ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

THE BEST WILD WEST STORIES PUBLISHED

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Application made at the N. Y. Post Office for entry as Second-class Matter.*

No. 155 NEW YORK, APRIL 6, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

KING OF THE WILD WEST'S TEST OF HONOR

or Stella in Bondage

As Ted dashed past he seized the tail of Pedro's horse, wrapped it around his saddle-horn and, without checking speed, whirled the Mexican end for end.

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King of the Wild West's Test of Honor;

OR,

STELLA IN BONDAGE.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

PHINEAS AHASUERAS BLOW.

"Jumpin' sand-hills and wanderin' waffles!"

It was the voice of Bud Morgan, the irrepressible friend and lieutenant of Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, who delivered himself of this explosive remark.

He had just finished breakfast, and was standing on the Moon Valley ranch-house veranda.

"What's doing?" asked Ben Tremont, from the table within.

"I wisht ye'd all look what ther airly mornin' breeze has blowed in onto us."

The boys left the breakfast-table on the rush, and were soon peering across the valley, at a youth astride of a dun-colored pony, called in the West a "claybank."

The claybank was very short in the legs, and the youth who bestrode him, had legs that were extraordinarily long. So long they were, that his toes almost touched the ground.

As he rode toward the house, the youth was singing at the top of his voice, the strains of a topical song.

He was a very bad singer, and as he drew closer, and the boys, who all understood music fairly well and who at least could sing in harmony, heard it they looked at one another and grinned.

"He has his nerve," said Kit Summers. "He has about as much right to sing as a peacock."

"What do you think he is, anyway?" asked Ben.

The youth was now so close that they could see him plainly.

"He's a tenderfoot who wants to learn to be a cow-boy," said Ben. "I'll bet he's another of these pests who will insist upon riding a bronk with plenty of ginger, and he'll get his collar-bone broken, and we'll have to mend him up again."

"Oh, I don't know, from what I see of him from here, he looks like a pretty decent sort of a chap. Anyhow, we'll learn what, and who he is, before we form any opinions," said Ted.

In a few minutes the stranger on the claybank pony stopped in front of the house and doffed his hat with a cavalier sweep, at the same time bowing low to them all.

"Gentlemen," said he, in his most polite voice, "I am delighted to see you."

"The pleasure's all yours," muttered Ben.

"I am in search of the well-known hero, Western scout and cow-puncher, Ted Strong, of whom I have heard so much," continued the youth on the pony, looking around at the group of boys on the veranda.

"Thar' he is, without disguise, an' with his hair in a braid," said Bud Morgan dryly, indicating Ted.

"That's my name," said Ted.

"Then pardner, I greet you," said the young fellow, smiling broadly. "My name is Phineas Ahasueras Blow. I introduce myself as the representative of the Flying H Ranch. I can't say that I am a finished product of the plains, but I do the best I can. I'll bet a cook to a

billion of dollars that I can get into more scrapes and get more bones broken on a ranch than any fellow here. Why, I've had more fractures of the legs and arms, to say nothing about minor bones, than any fellow here."

He looked around proudly, but as none of the boys knew his record, they did not accept his challenge.

Young Blow had a good-natured face, and fiery red hair, and there was an irresistible twinkle in his gray eyes, which showed him to be both good-natured and courageous.

"What can I do for you?" asked Ted, after inviting the stranger to alight and join them on the veranda.

Blow untangled himself from his stirrups, and his toes touched the ground, he was so tall.

"Nature fixed that fellow for walking instead of riding," muttered Ben to Kit.

"He sure is split far up," said Kit. "I don't believe I ever saw such long legs."

Blow walked up on the veranda and took the easiest chair in sight, then threw one leg over the other, and looked around.

"Since you won't introduce me, I guess I'll have to pick out the young rough riders from what I have heard of them," he said. "This is Bud Morgan, I'm sure."

He looked at the old cow-puncher, who grinned and acknowledged the recognition by reaching out his hand.

"Yer shore a discriminatin' cuss," said Bud. "But we seem, too, most impolite. This yere's Kit Summers; an' this ongainly critter is known ter fame as Ben Tremont, husky an' as good-natured a animile as yer want ter see when he's been fed. Carl Schwartz, ther crown prince o' Bratwurst, sits yonder, restin'. That's Carl's long suit, restin', ter say nothin' erbout an appetite fer baked beans. That's Clay Whipple, a proud son o' old Kaintuck, who can ride a hoss an' play ther fiddle, an' be perliter than ary feller yer ever see. That's Beanpole, whose constitution has been wrecked by his imagination. Fer a perfectly healthy kid he's the sickest one yer ever see. But I reckon yer know them all by sight as well as I do."

As Bud went over his introductions, the lanky Blow unwound his length from the chair and bowed and shook hands solemnly.

As he sat down again, all the boys looked at him inquiringly, but they were too polite to ask him his business.

"Say, boss," he said at last, with a general glance around, "I'm somewhat up against it, and I came to see if you wouldn't help me out of my difficulty. It's a heap of nerve to come to fellows who don't know me, but I know your generosity, and that you are not in the cattle business for your health."

"We shore ain't," said Bud.

"What's the nature of your trouble?" asked Ted. "If it's anything in the way of our business, we may be able to help you. We never turn anyone down who has a good cause."

"So I heard. It's like this. Some time ago my father gave me some money to go into the cattle business, and I came out here to learn it."

"You came to the right place," said Ted.

"I haven't learned it all," said Blow, with a grin, "but I've got next to some of it. Well, I bought a ranch, the Flying H, after I had persuaded some of my friends back in New York to go into it with me. They have put up their money, but they decline to come out here and punch cows, and that leaves it up to me."

"Pretty hard stunt for one who knows little of the business," suggested Kit.

"I've found it so. The first jump out of the box, they cheated me out of a bunch of cattle. I thought when I bought the Flying H, that I was going to get it stocked, but when I went to take possession of it, there wasn't the hair of a cow on it. They had all been sold."

"Didn't you have an agreement with the people you were buying from?" asked Ted.

"Thought I had, but it was by word of mouth only, and was not down on paper, so that when I went to a lawyer in Cheyenne about it, he told me that I had been 'stung,' and that there was nothing for me to do but to charge it to experience."

"You were pretty easy, eh?"

"I was, but I haven't given up yet. I'll get even with those fellows some of these days."

"By the way, who did you buy the Flying H from? I don't seem to remember it."

"It lies over by Buffalo, and I bought it from Harvey Fenton and his partner, Jack Quirk."

"Fenton and Quirk, eh?" Ted was looking at Blow with surprise.

"Do you know them?"

"Sure, everybody in this part of the country knows them. Didn't anyone say anything to you about them?"

"Yes, I met Colonel Suggs, who says he is a friend of yours, and he told me to have nothing to do with them. He saw me talking with them at Cheyenne. But I had given my word that I would buy the place then, and I didn't want to go back on it. Besides, they seemed to be such nice fellows. I'd have bet anything that Fenton was the best fellow I ever met."

"Yes, he's smooth enough, but being smooth doesn't make an honest man. Fenton is one of the worst crooks in this part of the West, and some of those cowmen up there should have been decent enough to tip you off to him before you got in too far."

"Well, I didn't go about telling everyone of my intention of buying the Flying H. It looked too good to me, and I didn't want to lose it by telling some one else how good it was, for fear they would all be breaking their necks to get it away from me."

Blow laughed at his own greed, which had been the cause of his losses, and the boys joined him. This showed them that at least he was game enough to take his losses without crying over it.

"You've been out to the ranch. At least you know whether or not *it* is there, eh?" said Ted.

"Well, I've seen a ranch which they call the Flying H. There is a ranch-house, and there were several cow-punchers about, but no cattle. When I asked for the cattle, Fenton told me that the stock that had been on the place did not go with it, and that they had sold it."

"You did not see the cattle, then?"

"No, there were none there when I went out. All I knew about them was what Fenton and Quirk told me, when we were talking sale in Cheyenne. I thought they were all right ,and paid my money, and then rode out to the Flying H, and it came out as I have told you."

"Say, I never so much as heard that there was a Flying H Ranch near Buffalo. The Flying H brand is the property of Captain Roswell, who lives in North Platte,

Nebraska, and who has ranges all through this country. If you hadn't said you had seen the ranch, I would believe that even it didn't exist. As a matter of fact, I don't believe there were any cattle for them to sell. My friend, I think you have been deeply stung, and that your money, and that of your friends is gone. But what can we do for you? It would seem as if it were a case for the lawyers, and the courts."

"No, I'll get it settled one of these days without that. As soon as I found that there was no cattle on the place, I said to myself, 'What's a ranch without cattle?' and I proceeded to buy a bunch."

The boys looked at one another with furtive grins. Certainly Phineas Ahasueras Blow was an optimist.

They wondered if he had been stung on the cattle too.

"Where did you get your cattle?" asked Ted.

"I bought them over in Nebraska," was the reply.

"Who did you buy them from?"

"Tom Dodson."

"Whew!"

"What's the matter?"

"Worse and more of it."

"Why?"

"Have you paid him for them?"

"Sure. They're waiting for me near Chadron."

"What was the brand of them?"

"The Sawbuck."

"Friend, I'm afraid you are up against a hard proposition. What you need is a guardian."

"Why, isn't the sale good. Don't tell me there are no cattle, for I saw them and counted them myself before I paid for them."

"Well, perhaps you have got them, but I wouldn't trust Dodson any more than I would Harvey Fenton or Jack Quirk, and that isn't any further than I could throw that red bull out there by the tail."

"I guess I did pick out a bad bunch to deal with, but that's a thing of the past."

"What do you want us to do? We're cattle raisers with a side line of running crooks out of the country, not lawyers."

"I tell you I don't want lawyers. I think I can pull out of this all right if I have some one whom I can trust give me some pointers on the cow business."

"We can do that all right. What is it?"

"I'm going to pull my friends out of this hole or blow up. It was not their fault that I've sunk their money, and I don't propose that they shall lose it, if I have to work all the rest of my days for nothing."

"That's the way to talk."

"I want you boys to go with me and get those cattle, and help me take them to the Flying H Ranch, and get me started. I'll do anything I can, and work like a dog. I want to learn the business, and with your help I think perhaps I can pull out all right."

"Do Fenton and Quirk know that you are onto their game, and that you have come to us for help?"

"They certainly do."

"Then if we accept your proposition we will have our work cut out for us. They hate the very ground the young rough riders walk on. But I like your nerve and the way you go about this, and as we have nothing very pressing on hand just now, I am in favor of going into it with you. What do you say, fellows?"

With one accord the young rough riders agreed with their leader.

"All right, boys," said Blow, rising and shaking hands all around. "That's mighty good of you, and I appreciate it very much. Now I feel confident that we will win, and that I will get what is coming to me."

CHAPTER II.

LOUISE A CAPTIVE.

"When will you be able to join me with the herd?" asked Blow, as he climbed upon his pony's back, having declined Ted's invitation to remain at the Moon Valley Ranch.

"We will leave here in the morning," said Ted, "and ride to Chadron. If you will meet us there we will take charge of the Sawbuck herd, and drive it to your ranch. Is that all right?"

"Everything you say goes with me," was Blow's reply. "I will see you in Chadron the morning after next, for I suppose it will take you at least a day to get there."

"Yes, we will get into Chadron to-morrow night if nothing happens to delay us, and we will see that the ladies are comfortably fixed for the night, and either meet you in town, or ride out to where the herd is. That is, if you will tell us where to find it."

"It is between the town and White River. I left word with the boys to drive slowly, and to let the cattle graze quietly until I could find you. I intended at first to write to you, but thought I could get quicker action if I came myself. If you like, I will ride straight to the herd and wait for you there. Is that all right?"

This was perfectly satisfactory to the boys, and they waved farewells to Blow as he rode away on his little claybank pony.

"I think that chap is on the square," said Ted, when Blow was out of earshot, "and I want to do what I can for him. I have another object in going into this."

"What is that?" asked Bud.

"You remember when we had that bunch of steers poisoned in Whatcome gulch? I never said much about that, but since then I have found out that Fenton and Quirk, and their men were at the bottom of that, because we beat them to the Fort Supply beef contract."

"Why didn't you put us next?" asked Bud in disgust.

"Well, I knew it wouldn't do much good to get excited over it at that time, for both the fellows were out of the country, and I knew that our time would come some day. Fenton and Quirk are dangerous men, and I don't want them in this part of the country. It's hard enough to get along as it is, without having to be afraid that those fellows will run off or harm your cattle in some way. I'm going to trap them if I can, and send them where they belong."

"And that is?"

"To the penitentiary."

"I reckon we're all in on that."

In the meantime Stella Fosdick, the girl pard of Ted Strong and the young rough riders, had heard of Blow's visit and its import.

"Here, I guess we're in on this trip!" she exclaimed, coming out on the veranda.

"What do you know about any trip?" asked Ted, laughing.

"Oh, I heard it. You don't think you could fool little Stella when there's anything going on, do you?"

"Do you think you'd like to go?"

"Surest thing you know, and Louise will go to. She's just crazy to go on a cattle drive. You know we promised her that we'd show her everything about the life, and here's our chance to go on a drive."

"All right," said Ted, "we'll all go. Tell your aunt that we'll fix things comfortably for her. It will not be much of a drive, however, from Chadron to Buffalo, Wyoming."

"Isn't that the White River country?"

"It is."

"Well, that would seem to be exciting enough. That's where those cattle rustlers have been having trouble with the ranchmen, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And wasn't it on the White River where the soldiers from Fort Robinson have had trouble with that bunch of Sioux under Buffalo Calf, the war-chief?"

"You're right."

"Then it's all right. It won't be so awfully slow. When do we start?"

"Early in the morning."

"What's the matter with starting to-day? The earlier the better. I want to get into the saddle again."

"Well, we might start this morning and camp by the way. I confess I'm rather tired of the house myself."

"Shall we get ready then?"

"Yes, you might as well."

"All right, I will run and tell Louise, while you attend to the other matters."

Thus it was, in a few minutes everything about the Moon Valley Ranch was bustling. The carriage for Mrs. Graham was got out, and Carl saw to the loading of the chuck-wagon with supplies and the bed tents for the outfit.

Kit got the remuda in hand, with the best cow-ponies on the place for the work that lay before them.

The morning was not half-spent, when they set forth with Ted in the lead, and Louise Rossiter by his side, while behind them rode Stella, flanked by Kit and Bud.

Louise Rossiter was paying Stella a long promised visit. After her adventure at the town of Rossiter, she had stopped at the Ranch for a day, and then had accompanied her father to California in the private car, but, as soon as her father's business had been attended to, she had insisted that he take her to the Moon Valley Ranch.

She had been there almost a month now, and under the tutelage of Ted and Stella, was perfecting herself in the duties and pastimes, as well as accomplishments of a cowgirl. She could shoot with tolerable accuracy, and could ride almost as well as Stella, although Stella had such an aptitude for the cattle business, that she had no equals among the cowgirls in all Dakota, although there were a few in Oklahoma and the Indian Territory, notably Lucille Mullhall and her sisters, who could give her a hard tussel when it came to roping and tying a steer.

But Stella was hardly tall enough, or strong enough to compete in this. However, when it came to rifle or pistol shooting, none of the girls in the country could equal her, and as for riding, she had been taught that by Ted Strong, than whom there was no better teacher in the West.

But Louise had progressed rapidly and Ted was very proud of her.

As they were riding along, Ted suddenly pointed to a speck on a far-away hill.

"Do you know what that is?" he asked Louise.

She replied that she did not, and looked at him inquiringly.

"That's an antelope. Do you want to ride for it, and see if we can get it?" said Ted.

Louise said that it would be a new experience, and that she would be delighted.

Stella had a light Remington rifle on her saddle and Ted borrowed it for Louise, at the same time getting his own rifle out of the wagon, and they rode away in the direction of where the antelope was apparently peacefully grazing on the hilltop.

After they had ridden about half-way, Ted stopped.

"If we're going to get it, we'll have to stalk it," said he. "You ride around to the north. There is a coulée following the line of that ridge, and if you keep in it and to windward of the antelope you will probably get a good shot at it. I'll ride to the south and try to come up the swale on the other side of it. Take your time when you get within shooting-distance, and don't get the buck fever."

They separated, and rode their ways.

In spite of what Ted had told her, Louise, who had never had a shot at big game, grew quite excited as she drew nearer the hill on which she could occasionally see the antelope raise its head, and peer cautiously in every direction, at the same time sniffing the air.

But as the wind was blowing away from it, and in Louise's direction, it did not get her scent.

Ted had taught Louise how to gage distance for a long shot, and how to manipulate the sights on her rifle.

It was not without a good deal of excitement, and with a trembling hand, that she took a careful sight.

Her finger was on the trigger, and she was just about to pull it when, to her amazement, she saw the antelope leap into the air, give a few bounds forward, and then fall toward the down side of the hill, and come rolling almost to her feet.

At the same time she heard the faint report of a rifle over the hill.

"It was horrid of Ted to kill it just as I was about to shoot," she said to herself. "But could he have got that far around?"

She rode toward the deer, and stooped over in her saddle to examine it more closely when she heard a slight noise and a handful of gravel came rolling down the hill toward her.

She looked up swiftly, and saw a tall young Indian with his long hair braided with pieces of otter skin, and two daubs of red paint on his cheek bones, standing on the hillside staring at her.

She let escape an involuntary exclamation of alarm, and sat up in her saddle gazing in a half-frightened way at the redskin.

Ted had told her not to be afraid of an Indian if she should happen to meet one. But the appearance of this one had been so sudden and unexpected, that she could not help it.

Then she looked the Indian over, and decided that he was harmless.

He was a fine looking chap, not more than twenty

years old. His eyes flashed a recognition and a tribute to her beauty, but he made no further motion to approach her or to speak. He was simply looking his fill at the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

He was dressed half in the Indian fashion, and half in the American way, and carried a rifle in the hollow of his arm.

After staring at Louise for a moment or two, he stalked down the hill toward her.

All the while his eyes were fastened on her, never once leaving her face. She was really beginning to be frightened, and wished Ted would come.

He stopped before the deer, rolled its carcass over with his foot, and grunted.

"You like um deer?" he asked seriously.

Louise shook her head, and did not otherwise reply.

"Me Sunatee," he said. "Heap big chief when father die."

Still Louise did not reply.

"You heap pretty gal," continued the Indian. "You come by my camp. I show you how make moccasins. You be my squaw."

Louise was now thoroughly alarmed, for the young Indian had grasped her bridle and was beginning to lead her pony up the hill which he had just descended.

As he did so Louise raised her whip and brought it down on the Indian's hand that held the bridle.

"Let me go," she cried.

The Indian did not show that the lash of the whip had hurt him at all, but looked at her with a strange gleam in his eyes. He had never been struck by a woman before, and it was to him, the most degrading humiliation that had ever come to him.

But it seemed rather to increase his admiration for the young white girl, than otherwise.

"Stop, you must let me go!" cried Louise again.

But Sunatee, son of the Sioux war-chief Buffalo Calf, continued to lead the pony.

By this time Louise was not only frightened, but angry, and again she raised the whip.

The Indian saw it rise, and looked at it with amused contempt.

Again she struck him with it, but this time it was across the face.

Sunatee's hand left the bridle and flew to his cheek, across which was a livid mark of the lash.

His stoicism was broken by the pain and the unexpectedness of the blow, and he muttered a stifled cry of rage.

To an Indian, a woman is a creature to be beaten. That has been his training since the time his mother had carried him as a papoose in a bundle on her back.

He sprang to her side when he felt the ridge across his cheek, furious at the insult.

His eyes were blazing with wrath, and his arm was raised to strike her.

For an instant Louise was stricken with terror at the situation, and sat helpless.

Then she realized her danger, and that she must defend herself.

In her belt was a revolver Ted had given her, a pretty pearl-handled weapon with which she could do much good execution at the target.

But as she felt it in her hand, the horror of shooting at a human being overcame her, and she lowered it.

The Indian saw the motion, and realized its import, for with a grunt of satisfaction he made another move toward her, and as he did so she recovered her voice and uttered a piercing shriek.

She heard a noise on the hill above, and a rattle of stones and knew that Ted was coming.

As Ted reached the hilltop and saw what was going on below, he shouted to Louise, to let her know that he was near, and bounded down the incline toward her.

The Indian had heard the noise made by Ted, and the shout, and gave one brief glance up the hill, and then ran toward Louise, dropping his rifle as he did so.

As he came closer, Louise again raised her revolver, but before she had a chance to fire the Indian knocked it from her hand.

So quickly, that she had not time to realize what he was about, Sunatee placed one hand behind her saddle and sprang upward and astride of the horse, at the same time digging it with his heels and reaching around to take the reins.

Ted stopped short, and brought his rifle to his shoulder, but saw immediately that he would not be able to shoot without running the risk of wounding of killing Louise, and he lowered it again.

"Stop, or I'll kill you!" he shouted.

But Sunatee only looked over his shoulder with a grin on his dark face, and continued to urge the horse forward, and was soon out of sight, around a bend of the coulée.

CHAPTER III.

A DUEL FOR A GIRL.

Ted had left Sultan in the swale on the other side of the hill, and now he placed his fingers to his lips and gave a long, low whistle.

This was answered by a whinny from the little black stallion, and in a moment it came over the top of the hill looking for him.

Another whistle brought it down the hill to him, and he sprang into the saddle and dashed down the coulée in the wake of Louise and her captor.

He was enraged to think that such a thing could happen, for while the Indians were never to be wholly trusted, still they had been quiet for some time, except that Buffalo Calf had been on a hunting-expedition, contrary to the orders of the Indian department, and had refused to return to the reservation when ordered to do so. As a result, the soldiers from Fort Robinson had been sent out after them.

It was greatly feared that there would be a collision between the soldiers and the reds, and everyone was trying to smooth things over with the Indians and avoid trouble.

The result of this was, that the Indians were inclined to be conceited over the matter, thinking that the soldiers, and the white ranchmen and settlers were afraid of them.

Ted had not recognized the young Indian who had run off with Louise, but he did not doubt that he was a member of Buffalo Calf's band. If he found this to be true, Ted vowed he would punish the Indians, even if the troops did not.

It was a dangerous thing to do, to override the authority of the troops, but he resolved to stand on his rights as a deputy United States marshal.

When he got to the mouth of the coulée he looked about for the boys, but they had disappeared from sight, nor could he see anything of Louise and the Indian.

But this was not strange, for they had only to ride over the top of the next rolling hill to be out of sight.

There was no trail on the hard, sunbaked earth, and he climbed a hill and looked about.

As he was looking in every direction he saw the Indian urging Louise's horse up to the top of a hill some distance to the west and that she was struggling in his grasp, evidently trying to get down from the saddle.

With a wild shout Ted put the spurs to Sultan and started in pursuit.

Sunatee, the Sioux, heard the shout, and urged the horse the harder.

From the top of a rise Ted could now see that the Indian was making for a camp by the side of a stream about a mile away.

It consisted of many wigwams, and Ted believed that it belonged to Buffalo Calf and his band of mutineers.

If this proved to be true Ted saw that he was in for a hard time, for it would never do to permit such an act as the running off with a young white girl to go unpunished.

He would not have hesitated for a minute to attack the camp if the boys were with him, but, as it was, he would have to be more cautious and attain his end in a more diplomatic way.

He was drawing closer to the fleeing Indian now, for Louise's horse was growing weary under the double burden.

But Sunatee beat him into the camp, and Ted saw the horse disappear among the teepees.

Without slacking his speed Ted dashed into the camp, and found it in a state of wild confusion, with the bucks running about arming themselves and the squaws and papooses scurrying for the shelter of the teepees.

Before the chief's teepee sat old Buffalo Calf, calmly smoking his pipe, but the young buck who had stolen Louise was nowhere to be seen.

As Ted stopped in front of the chief he dropped from the saddle, and, turning to Buffalo Calf, said in the Sioux language:

"Where is the young white girl who was brought here by one of your men?"

The old chief did not reply. He continued to suck away at his stone pipe and blink at Ted with his smoke-bleared eyes.

"Where is the girl, I say?" Ted repeated angrily.

"She is with the squaws," said the chief.

"Send for her at once or I will go for her," said Ted, "and if I do there will be trouble for all of you."

"The young white girl has taken the fancy of my son, the young chief Sunatee. He desires her for his squaw. They are making her ready."

As the old chief said this he made a slight motion with his hand, and the braves, all of whom were well armed with rifles and knives, moved up in a circle about Ted.

"Are you going to send for the girl and permit her to go away peacefully, or do you want to fight?" asked Ted.

"My son wants the girl. That is enough," was the answer.

"Then he must fight for her. She belongs to my people, and she doesn't want to live with yours."

Ted had no sooner said this than a scream rang out from among the teepees.

This was more than Ted could stand, and he dashed forward, to be met be a stalwart brave, who jumped in his way.

This did not stop Ted, however, for he landed on the Indian with his right fist, and the redman went backward into the fire that was burning before Buffalo Calf's teepee. As the other Indians moved up to intercept Ted he dashed between them.

"Where are you, Louise?" he called as he ran.

"Here I am," she called back from a large tent which was covered with Indian pictures, and which Ted took to be the teepee of Sunatee.

He ran to it and threw back the flap that covered the entrance.

Louise was sitting on a pile of skins in a corner, held by three Indian women, while the young buck who had run off with her was standing in the middle of the tent nursing a wound in his arm.

In a moment of desperation, while Sunatee was struggling with her to get her into the tent, Louise had grasped his knife from his belt and stabbed him with it, and then he had turned her over to the tender mercies of the squaws, who were pinching her and beating her.

With a bound Ted was by her side, and scattered the squaws in all directions.

Louise bounded to her feet and ran to Ted's side.

"I am so glad you came," she said, catching him by the arm and holding onto him. "They have frightened me so. They were going to marry me to this red brute according to their Indian fashion. You have come just in time to save me."

"We will get out of here," said Ted. "I will settle with this chap later. I know him now. It will be prison for him after I have taught him that it is not a good thing for an Indian to interfere with a white girl."

But Sunatee was not to be so easily deprived of his prize, and he stepped in front of the opening of the tent.

"My gal," he said in English. "She come with me, eh?"

"If you don't get out of my way I'll fix you so that you'll never need a girl," said Ted, with a flash of the eye that would have warned any one except an Indian.

"No. I want gal," said the Indian.

Ted had drawn his revolver and was holding it ready to shoot if it came to the worst, but he did not want to fire, because he knew that if he did so there would be a general fight and he would without doubt get the worst of it.

"Me fight you for gal," said the Indian, seeing that Ted was not to be bluffed.

"I'll fight you, but not for the girl. She is not to be fought for by an Indian. But I want to show you that you cannot go unpunished for what you have done. Get out of here and call your braves together."

Sunatee left the teepee, and Ted followed with Louise still clinging to his arm.

The bucks of the band had gathered about Sunatee's tent, and were talking excitedly, while the squaws whom Ted had torn away from Louise were shrieking at him and telling the bucks that he had abused them.

It was a critical moment for both Ted and Louise, and they realized it fully.

At another time Ted would have dominated the situation, as any white man would. But now the band was

really on a war footing, and the relations with all whites, and especially the soldiers, were very badly strained.

The Indians had believed Ted to be a soldier on account of his khaki uniform, and this made the situation doubly dangerous.

But it was a time when Ted could not show by even the flash of an eye that he so regarded it.

He pushed his way boldly through the thronging braves and made his way to the teepee of the chief.

"Your son and I will fight here," said Ted, pointing to the open space in the middle of the village.

"How you want fight?" asked Sunatee, with a look of disdain at Ted.

"Any way you choose," said Ted.

"All right. I wrestle with you, and strangle."

This is one of the favorite methods among the Indians themselves of settling their differences, especially if the quarrel be about a woman.

A good many of the Indians understood enough English to know what had been said, and they communicated the news of the coming bout to those who did not.

Instantly there was a great hubbub among them, for an encounter of this sort was a great diversion among the Sioux.

Ted did not know it, but Sunatee was a master at this particular sort of fighting. Ted was not afraid of the game, although he knew nothing as yet about it.

As soon as the news went forth two men took Sunatee away and into a tent at the end of the village.

"Ted, I'm awfully afraid they are going to hurt you," said Louise. "Cannot we get away? See, there are our horses. Let us make a rush for them and escape."

"They would shoot us down before we got fifty feet away, Louise," answered Ted. "No, the only thing for me to do is to fight this arrogant young Indian and give him all that's coming to him. Don't be afraid for me. I think I can beat him, and if I do I'll give him something to remember. If he gets the better of me you will not suffer, for I am sure the boys will start in search of us when we do not return at dark, and they will settle the question with these Indians in a way the troops do not seem to have the nerve to do. I wonder where those soldiers are now."

Sunatee now appeared, coming from the tent with his two seconds.

He was stripped, save for a breech-clout and a pair of moccasins.

His copper-colored body shone like polished bronze under the coat of grease with which he had been liberally smeared.

He was a splendid specimen of young, athletic manhood as he strutted proudly through the crowd, his head held high, and casting disdainful glances here and there.

Ted saw at once that he was going to be at a disadvantage with the fellow on account of his greased body.

But he stripped off his coat and hat and threw them on the ground, and handed his cartridge-belt and revolver to Louise with the warning not to let them get out of her possession.

"We may need them in the end," he said.

He then removed his shoes, for the grass was slippery.

In the meantime the bucks had driven the squaws and young Indians back far enough to make a good-sized circle in front of Buffalo Calf's teepee, and the two gladiators stepped into it.

Ted knew how to wrestle, and was versed in a good many tricks that he was sure the Indian did not know, but he was wise enough to know that the Indian probably had tricks of his own that were equally effective, and he resolved to learn them and use them as soon as he could.

The young Indian looked at Ted with scorn, while Ted stood before him ready to begin the bout.

Ted was as calm as if he were not going to fight for his life with this vindictive young savage, who would take every advantage he could.

Louise was watching them with a face as pale as chalk, and her heart beating like a triphammer. She had all faith in Ted's courage and prowess, but she feared treachery of some sort. If only the other boys were there she would not have feared so much.

The fighters were now circling around one another looking for an opening to begin.

The Indian was showing off for the benefit of his fellows and the young squaws who were looking at him with admiration. He was skipping about and dancing, now on one foot, now on another, like a jumping-jack, until he became really ridiculous.

"I'll stop that," thought Ted.

Suddenly he rushed in and grasped the Indian by the belt of his breech-clout with one hand and by the hair with the other, and, with a wrench, bent him backward almost double.

The Indian gave a groan and struggled wildly to get a hold on Ted.

Then Ted's hands slipped, and the Indian sprang forward again as if he was made of rubber, and, before Ted knew what was going to happen, had him in a good, firm, wrestling grip.

But every time Ted caught at the Indian his hands slipped off the greased body, and he knew that now he had the fight of his life.

It was easy for the Indian to hold his advantage, for he kept his grasp on Ted's clothes, and was bending him backward.

His dark hand was creeping toward Ted's throat, and Louise, observing it, uttered a little scream which caused the squaws to laugh with delight.

Now Sunatee had Ted by the throat, and Ted hardened his muscles to resist the pressure, but all the while struggling for a hold on the Indian's body.

At last he got his fingers in the young chief's long locks, and began to pull his head sidewise.

Over, and further over, he bent the head until the Indian's eyes started from their sockets and the bones of the neck creaked from the pressure.

Ted felt that Sunatee's fingers were beginning to relax on his throat. As a matter of fact, Ted had succeeded in almost strangling the Indian. Then, with a sudden wrench, he was able to make the Indian let go of his throat, and his own hand swung suddenly to the Indian, and he had his neck in a firm grasp.

Sunatee's eyes rolled backward in his head and his tongue began to protrude, and Ted knew he had him beaten, and threw him from him to the ground.

This was too much for the endurance of the Indians, and, with wild cries of rage and revenge, they sprang toward Ted, while above it all arose a scream from Louise.

Ted sprang toward her to get his revolver when there came to their ears the long yell of the young rough riders, as they dashed into the Indian village.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMPELLING EYES.

Stella rode at the head of the young rough riders as they swarmed into the Indian village, and her shrill young voice in a cheer of triumph and courage sent the squaws and papooses scurrying to safety. The bucks thought the soldiers had come and knew better than to fight them, so they, too, threw down their rifles and hurried away.

Only the old chief remained, and he still sat in front of his teepee pulling at his pipe, and his son, who had not recovered from the punishment Ted had administered to him, still lay within the ring.

Ted bent over Sunatee and examined him, and, finding him in no danger, called three of the bucks and had him borne away to his own tent.

"Now," said Ted, turning to the old chief, "I'm not going to report this to the soldiers, but you'd better be careful in the future what you or your son or your men do about capturing white women. Your son should go to prison for this, but he is young and foolish, and didn't realize exactly what he was doing, and I have given him something he won't forget in a while. An Indian is no match for a white man, and you are old enough to understand that."

"The young white man is very brave and a good fighter," said Buffalo Calf. "His heart is good also, for he does not bear the boy any ill-will. He is my friend and brother."

The old chief extended his hand to Ted, who shook it heartily, and, slipping into his coat and shoes, helped Louise to mount. Leaping into his saddle, he led the boys out of the Indian village to the trail to Chadron, after he had offered the carcass of the dead deer to the chief, who sent two of his bucks out after it.

That night they camped by the side of a beautiful little stream, and in the morning were on the way to Chadron again, where they arrived early.

Ted had some supplies to buy and was in no hurry to hit the trail of the Sawbuck herd, which was probably crawling along a few miles out in the direction of the White River; and they would find it without trouble when they set out for that purpose.

Ted left the girls and Mrs. Graham in a hotel where they would be comfortable until they were all ready to start for the White River.

That evening as he was walking down the street he passed a man who looked at him closely, then turned and followed him. Ted had not observed him, and kept on his way unconscious that he was the object of the fellow's scrutiny.

But had he known he would not have wondered at it much.

The man was about thirty years old, handsome in a bold, dark way, and rather dissipated looking. He was of the type of Western gambler, well known in all the cowtowns; the sort of man who, by his apparent good fellowship, wins the confidence of the cow-punchers when they come to town, and then takes their money away from them by dishonest gambling.

But Ted was not looking for trouble, and therefore he was not observing troublesome people. Had he known that he was being followed he would have observed also that another person was on the trail of his pursuer.

The third member of this procession was a typical cow-puncher, much the worse for wear. His clothes were shabby, and he had a three or four-days' growth of beard on his chin.

He slouched along as if he was merely walking up and down the streets because he had no money and nothing else to do.

Ted had learned that young Blow was in town, and that he was in trouble. Blow, it appeared from his informant, had not gone to where the herd he had bought was awaiting his arrival, but had stayed in Chadron.

Blow had received a letter that day telling him to call at a house on the edge of the town if he desired to know something to his advantage concerning the bunch of cattle he had bought from Tom Dodson.

This had excited his curiosity, and he had expressed his intention of going to the house at nine o'clock that night.

When Ted went to the hotel to see that the ladies of the party were comfortably settled the clerk, who knew him well, handed him a note.

"Mr. Strong," he said, "this note came for you a little while ago. It was handed into the office by a man who was a cow-puncher, to judge from his clothes and manners. He said you were expected here to-night, and asked if you would be sure to get it."

Ted thanked the clerk, opened the envelope and read a short note, which was written on a dirty piece of paper with a lead-pencil.

"Ted Strong," the note began, "a friend of yours, name of Blow, is still in town. I don't know if you will get in in time to see him, but if you don't he may need your help before the night is over. He has been asked to go to a certain house at nine o'clock. I don't know the purpose of the visit, but I don't think it means any good to him—or to you. I am not in the secret, but I know you and I want to warn you that he will need you. The house is to be found as follows: When you leave the station walk east along the railroad-track until you come to the deep cut just this side of the bridge. Climb the bank of the cut at the further end and go south across the prairie. There is a small pine grove there, and beyond it a two-story house with red curtains. I overheard this much. That is where Blow is to meet the men who want to see him. That is all I know, except that I distrusted the messenger who brought him the word and overheard that much."

The note was not signed.

When Ted read it he looked round for Bud and the boys, but they had gone out.

It was almost nine o'clock when he read the message, and he determined not to wait for their return, but to venture forth alone to see what had befallen Blow.

The house to which he was directed was on the edge of the town and within pistol shot of the main street, and he had no fear that anything would happen to Blow or himself, especially at nine o'clock in the evening.

The note piqued his curiosity also, and if Blow was in trouble he wanted to know it.

Had he looked around he would have seen that he was being followed by the rakish-looking fellow who took pains to be seen as little as possible by keeping to the shadow.

As Ted crossed the field, after following the directions offered in the note, he saw the pine wood in front of

him, and, with his usual caution, drew his revolver and examined it carefully, and when he came within the shadow of the wood paused and glanced about him.

There was nothing to alarm him, and he went forward until he could see through the trees the red lights in the house, where the glow from a lamp shone through the curtains.

He approached the house quietly and listened at one of the windows, for he found that he could not see into the house.

He heard low voices within, one of which appeared to be that of a woman, but he could not distinguish what was being said.

Then he went to the door, and, just as he got there, it opened and a woman, beautiful and well-dressed, threw it open.

"Good evening," she said in a low, smooth voice. "Come in. You are expected."

Ted looked beyond her and saw that no one else was in the room.

Her appearance at the door was a complete surprise to him, and he was rather taken aback, but he walked up the steps and entered the room.

"I didn't know I was expected," he said coolly.

"You are a friend of Mr. Blow, are you not?" asked the woman.

"I know Mr. Blow," said Ted. "But, tell me, how did you know that I was expected?"

The only reply to this question was an arch look and a low, rippling laugh.

Somewhere not far away Ted heard a door being softly closed, then the sibilant sound of whispering.

There was something so mysterious about the whole thing that it caused Ted a little uneasiness. He felt that he had been drawn into a trap of some sort, and that he would have to be very cautious.

"Where is Mr. Blow?" he asked at last.

"He is in the other room. Would you like to see him?" the woman asked.

Her manner was very friendly and not at all open to suspicion, and if she was acting a part she was a very good actress indeed.

Ted could see nothing to be gained sitting where he was, and so he told her that he had come to see Mr. Blow and would be glad if she would conduct him to where he was.

For answer she rose and beckoned him to follow her.

Stopping at the door leading into another room she listened intently, then opened it and invited him with a nod of her head to enter.

The room was in the semi-gloom of a lamp turned low.

Ted passed before her into the room as she stood aside for that purpose, and as soon as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light he saw that in the center of the room was a couch, over which had been thrown a sheet, and beneath the sheet was a human form.

There was something ghastly about the whole thing, and Ted looked up with inquiry in his eyes, but the woman had withdrawn softly and closed the door behind her.

Ted went to the door on his tiptoes and tried to open it.

It had been locked.

Still he felt not the least alarm, for he had his revolver, and felt competent to protect himself whatever might turn up.

For several moments he gazed at the still form beneath the sheet to discover any movement, if it was there.

But the thing was perfectly rigid and still, and he walked to the couch and gently drew the sheet aside.

Beneath it was the figure of Blow, but how changed from the ruddy, good-natured fellow he had seen just a few hours before.

Apparently he was dead, for his face was waxen in hue, and when Ted put his hand upon the forehead it was as cold as a block of ice.

Suddenly into his mind came Blow's story of his dealings with Fenton and Quirk and Tom Dodson.

Then his mind began to work quickly. Those three men had meant to swindle Blow out of his money and the money his friends had entrusted him with.

Perhaps it was known that Blow had gone to the young rough riders for assistance, and that it was necessary to put him out of the way before the thing had been exposed and the swindlers forced to leave the country, as they knew they surely would if the King of the Wild West got on their trail. It would be either that or go to jail, for they knew how shrewd and relentless Ted was in the pursuit of criminals.

Was this but the first act in a conspiracy to destroy all evidence of the theft from Blow and his friends?

As Ted was thinking over these things he was conscious that he was beginning to feel drowsy.

He walked to the door and tried it again, but he could not open it. The window was nailed fast, and could not be opened.

Suddenly he realized what the matter was. He was being hypnotized, and he knew what had happened to Blow.

Going to the lounge he placed his ear above Blow's heart.

It was beating regularly. Evidently all that ailed Blow was suspended animation.

The feeling of lassitude was growing on him, and he wondered what it was that had such control over him.

His glance wandered around the room and stopped suddenly as he encountered a pair of eyes fastened upon him.

It was the face of the woman who had opened the door for him, but now it was framed as a picture in the wall.

It appeared to him odd that while he knew that the head was alive there was not the slightest movement about it. Not for an instant did the eyes waver, and he was looking into them steadily. There was not a flicker of an eyelash, or the movement of a muscle.

He tried to look away, and became conscious that he could not move his eyes from those compelling orbs in the picture-frame.

Suddenly he began to feel faint and weak, and his knees wavered beneath him.

He could not remember when he had felt so weak and helpless.

He knew that he was being influenced by those wonderful eyes, and tried to escape, but he could not.

Now the lips began to move and the face in the picture was saying something to him. But he heard it as if it came from afar instead of being in the same room with it.

"Now, Ted Strong," the faraway voice said, "you are going to sleep. All animation will be suspended until I restore you to life and action. You will be as one dead,

[illegible] you will not die in two [illegible] you [illegible]. When the [illegible] you will be [illegible], but not before. You are going—going—when you are [illegible].

Ted sank to the floor and knew no more.

CHAPTER V.

[illegible]

As Ted Strong sank to the floor a [illegible] looking cow-puncher glanced in at the window for an instant, then turned away and [illegible] beyond the corner of the house, set out on a run through the woods.

For as he did so there was a commotion within the house. The dark house upon a [illegible] and fired several shots in the direction in which the cow-puncher had fled.

He was followed by several other men, who ran through the woods, calling to one another not to let the [illegible] escape.

But he did escape, for presently the men returned one by one and entered the house, and the door was closed upon the last one and bolted.

In the course of a half hour the lights in the house were extinguished and several dark figures quietly emerged, locking the door behind them, and a few minutes later they were riding quietly across the prairie.

In the midst of the group was a veiled woman.

* * * * * * *

Bud Morgan was waiting in the rotunda of the hotel for Ted to return. The clerk had told him of the note, after reading which Ted had gone out.

Stella had come down-stairs to speak to Ted before she retired, and she and Bud were keeping the vigil between them, for they had both grown uneasy at his prolonged absence.

While they were talking about it a disreputable cow-puncher entered the hotel and stood leaning against the wall opposite Bud.

Presently Bud looked up. His eyes met those of the cow-puncher, and a signal passed between them.

In a few minutes Bud excused himself from Stella and arose and wandered out the front door. Soon he was followed by the cow-puncher.

"Now, I wonder what that's about," said Stella to herself, for she had shrewdly guessed that something had passed between the two, and she vaguely felt that it concerned Ted.

She made up her mind to wait until Bud returned to tell her.

He was gone about ten minutes, and when he came back she knew by the look on his face that something had happened to disturb him.

"What is it, Bud?" she asked.

"About Ted," was the golden-haired one's reply.

"What? what?" she asked impatiently.

"Did you see that cow-puncher follow me out?"

Stella nodded.

"Well, he told me the craziest story yer ever listened to. I get a [illegible] of notion he's pouch dipper," said Bud, shaking his head.

"What's it all about? Get down to business," said Stella impatiently.

"[illegible] Ted's [illegible] house and [illegible] Bud [illegible] in a room with a [illegible] man, and the house fell to pieces when he [illegible] that he was lookin' in at a window. [illegible] says he saw a live picture of a woman on the wall of the room, which disappeared when he looked at her and saw that she was looking at him. Then he started to run and the man met him out of ther house an' chased him through the woods, firin' at him, and then he came here to find me to tell about it."

"Who is he?"

"Search me. Says he's a friend o' Ted's, an' follered him on the times, the [illegible]."

"What do you think of it?"

"Dog-gone if I know. It may be a plant o' some kind to get us out there."

"Do you know where the house is?"

"Yes, ther feller told me plain enough that."

"Where is he now. Did you let him get away?"

"Oh, I reckon he's out there. I'll go an' git him, an' you can talk to him, an' see what you can make out o' it."

Bud went out on the sidewalk and looked up and down, and then returned with a sheepish look on his face.

"He's faded away. I plumb thought he was goin' ter stay there."

"Well, we'll have to take a chance on his information being correct. I'm going up-stairs to get ready to go out, and you go and wake up the boys. We'll need them all. I'm going to hunt for Ted if it takes all night."

"That's the stuff," said Bud, waking up. "I was a ninny not to think of it before. Let's get a move on us."

It was not long before the boys were quietly assembling in the lobby of the hotel.

Stella had warned them not to attract too much attention to themselves as fear they might be watched, and attention to them would frustrate their plans.

One by one they left the hotel and assembled again on a dark side street, from whence they made their way to the railroad-tracks, and then to the mysterious house in the pine woods.

They approached the house with the greatest caution, only to find it dark and apparently abandoned.

Surrounding the house quietly, they tried every means of entrance, and found them all securely fastened.

"I'm goin' ter break in one o' ther doors," said Bud, "an' take a chance o' gettin' a bullet through it. Stand ready ter back me up, you fellers, an' be fixed ter make a rush."

Bud put his shoulder to the door just above the lock and pushed on it with all his force.

It cracked and creaked, but there was no attack from within, and, seeing that his efforts were without avail, he stepped back a few feet and made a rush at it with his shoulder, and the door flew open.

Bud dodged back into the darkness as the door went in. He feared an ambuscade.

But there was no sound within, and he entered.

Striking a match he looked around. It was the room into which Ted had first been ushered, but it was now deserted.

A lamp stood on the table and Bud lighted it, and Stella and the boys followed him in.

"Nothin' doin' here," said Bud, holding up the lamp and looking around. "I'm just a-wonderin' if we aren't fooled an' have broken inter some man's house like a bunch o' burglars."

"Well, we might as well be hanged for a sheep as a goat," said Stella. "Let us see what there is in the other rooms."

The door leading into the next room was locked and the key had been removed.

"Here, Ben," said Stella, "put that big shoulder of yours against this door and let us through."

As the door went in with a crash Bud followed with the light, and as they saw the corpse-like figure of Blow on the lounge and Ted's apparently lifeless body on the floor they fell back with cries of horror.

Not one of them but believed that Ted was dead.

But Ben hurried to Ted and lifted him from the huddled heap into which he had fallen when the woman in the picture pronounced sentence of suspended animation on him, and laid him on the floor.

Then he placed his hand on Ted's heart, and, after feeling that it beat with life, he looked at Stella and said:

"He is not dead!"

"Then what is the matter, Ben?" asked Stella in an awed voice.

"I cannot tell. He may be poisoned. We better get him to the hotel as soon as possible and have a doctor."

"Then let us start at once."

The boys wrenched a couple of shutters from the windows and laid the bodies of the two boys upon them, and the sad and solemn procession started back through the dark to the hotel.

They managed to get the boys into their rooms without attracting attention and sent immediately for a physician.

When he arrived and had examined them he came to the correct conclusion.

"It is a remarkable case," he said when they told him of the story of the disreputable cow-puncher and how they had broken into the house and found the two boys. "There is only one conclusion, and the sight of the woman's face in the picture-frame which the cow-puncher saw, and its immediate disappearance when she saw that she had been discovered, leads me to believe that both these young men have been hypnotized."

"Can't you give them something to bring them out of it?" asked Stella.

"I am not a hypnotist," said the doctor. "I doubt if any one can do that except the person who exercises the influence over them."

"Then would they stay this way always?" asked Stella in a horrified tone of voice.

"Not always, but probably until they died."

"But what are we to do. This is too horrible," exclaimed Stella.

"There is only one thing to do," answered the doctor solemnly.

"And that is?" asked Stella.

"Find the woman who has put this spell upon them," answered the doctor. "I can do nothing for them."

There was a look of despair on the faces of all as the doctor said this.

"Hold on," he cried, "what's the matter with us? Find the cow-puncher who saw the woman. He will be able to tell us how she looked, and perhaps, through her description, we may find her and compel her to bring the boys out of the trance."

"That seems the only thing to do, but we cannot find him to-night," said Stella.

The doctor went away, but there was no sleep for Louise, who had been aroused, nor for Stella and the boys that night.

Early the next morning Bud and Kit started out to try to find the cow-puncher who had seen the face in the picture-frame, for both of them had seen him.

But in spite of all they could do they got no news of him.

They found plenty of people who had observed him in the town for several days, but they did not know where he had come from, for he was an unusually reticent man and had told no one what ranch he worked for or where he was going.

They did learn that he had not been seen since the previous evening, and that was all.

All the boys turned out to try to find him, and not a house or hole of any kind in the town but was searched. But he had disappeared completely.

The next day it was the same.

Stella and Louise and Mrs. Graham took turns in watching the two youths, who lay in the same room looking for all the world like corpses, yet sustaining life by reason of the missing woman's will.

The doctor went to see them every hour and felt their pulses.

"They're getting weaker, and losing vitality every hour," was his verdict. "We've got to find that woman and compel her to release them or they'll die. They cannot keep this up much longer."

The doctor was very serious as he said this, leaving Louise in tears and Stella very determined looking.

There was no news of the cow-puncher the next day, and even hopeful Bud and cheerful Kit began to lose heart.

That evening Bud was sitting in the lobby of the hotel thinking, when he happened to look up.

In front of him, across the room, stood the disreputable looking cow-puncher. But he looked good to Bud.

The cow-puncher gave an almost imperceptible nod of his head toward the door, and Bud sauntered that way and out into the street.

"Where ther dickens you been?" asked Bud peevishly, for he was cross from worry and loss of sleep. "We've been lookin' fer yer high and low ever since yer went away."

"I was out looking for the woman," was the reply.

"Did you find her?" asked Bud, losing all his peevishness in the flood of hope that overwhelmed him.

"I shore did," said the cow-puncher with an air that said he never started for anything but he found it.

"What does she say?"

"Didn't ask her, for I didn't get close enough for that. But I know where she is locked up. I think she'd like to get out, too, if there were a few husky fellows who had the nerve to go against a tough game."

"We've got 'em. Are you game enough to lead the way?"

"You bet I am. When do you want to start?"

"Right now."

"Better wait until morning. Things will be better for traveling then, and we can see better how to get there. But I want to give you one piece of advice based on what I know about these things."

"What's that?"

"Take those two boys along with you if you want to save their lives."

"We'll do it. Be here early in the morning."

CHAPTER VI.

ATTACK ON THE STONE HOUSE.

[illegible] of Chadron, Nebraska, in the foothills of the Black Hills, is a rise of land known as Crow Butte, where in ancient days, when the Sioux [illegible] the Crow Indians, happened a tragedy which gave it its name.

There had been a battle between the warring tribes, and the Sioux had been victorious.

They had been fighting on the plain, and when they saw that they had been vanquished the Crows fled.

There was only one way to escape, and that was up the side of a butte that rose gradually from the prairie on the west.

The butte climbed up gently, but on the eastern side it dropped in a sheer precipice of many hundred feet to the plain below.

The Crows took up the sloping side of the butte with the Sioux in full pursuit, shouting exultantly, for they knew there was no escape for their enemies.

The Crows knew what was before them, but they did not hesitate.

They rode bravely to a death which they knew would be more merciful than any the Sioux would offer them.

In the lead was their chief in the full panoply of war-paint and feathers, and behind him came his braves singing their death-song.

They reached the top and the edge of the precipice, and the chief, with a yell of defiance, leaped off into space.

Behind him came his braves, each with a yell of defiance for the Sioux. One by one they went over, to be dashed to death on the plain below, and the Sioux, following closely, came to a halt at the edge of the precipice and looked down at the piled up bodies of the Crows beyond the pains of torture at the stake and the fire.

Ever afterward the butte was called after the Crows.

As Bud Morgan and Stella, leading the young rough riders, were riding across the plain the morning following the return of the cow-puncher the precipice of Crow Butte loomed into view.

In the rear of the cavalcade came the chuck-wagon, in which, on swinging cots, arranged with much ingenuity by the boys, lay the bodies of Ted and Blow. So far no one except themselves and the doctor in Chadron knew of the condition of the two, so carefully had the secret been guarded.

As Crow Butte loomed up on the horizon the cow-puncher, who had given his name as Wiley Fox, for want of a better, pointed to it.

In spite of his disreputable appearance, Fox was not an ordinary man, as Ted soon perceived. He had a cool, resourceful eye, and behind his whiskers could be traced a handsome and strong face.

He did not volunteer any information about himself, and, after the manner of the West, where it is not always advisable to ask a man his name, his business, or his place of residence, Bud did not press him for anything save his name, and that in the most diplomatic way.

"What shall I call yer, anyway?" asked Bud. "It ain't always handy ter call a feller 'Say' every time he wants ter talk with him."

"That's all right," answered the cow-puncher. "call me Wiley Fox. It's as good a name as any.

There was a twinkle in his eye as he said it that [illegible] appreciated, for the cow-puncher had proved himself [illegible] and a [illegible] too.

While Fox was in the lead of the expedition acting as [illegible] as they neared Crow Butte he turned back [illegible] to Bud and Stella:

"I don't reckon we'd better go much farther to-day."

"Why not?" asked Stella, who was impatient for [illegible]

"[illegible] butte yonder? Well, thar's where we [illegible] and I reckon there's a lookout on every [illegible] of it. Night time is for us to do our work in."

"Then we'd better camp and prepare for the work. Those boys have got to be rescued from the condition they are in pretty soon. I've just been back to the wagon and they're getting mighty weak."

"[illegible] miss," said Fox. "I know the shape they're in but it wouldn't do for us to go ridin' straight up to where them folks is in daylight. We'd spoil the whole business."

"I guess you know what you're talking about, but I wish night would hurry."

They went into camp on a stream to the west of the town of Crawford, which lies not far from Crow Butte.

As they passed through the town they heard alarming rumors about Buffalo Calf's band of Sioux.

Sunatee, the young chief, had deserted his father's village, taking with him all the young warriors, who were spoiling for a fight.

It was said that Sunatee was out for revenge on the whites for some insult or other, which did not seem very clear to the soldiers or the citizens, and that they were bound for the west.

Of course the young rough riders knew why Sunatee had gone on the warpath with the young men.

When he had recovered from the punishment administered by Ted he had been angry that his enemy had escaped, and had started in pursuit.

But they said nothing of this, although it gave them some uneasiness, particularly because Ted's condition put him out of the leadership.

As night came on the boys got restless to go in search of help for Ted and Blow. The camp had been in g[illegible] all day, and often the eyes of Louise and Stella were wet with tears as they observed the growing weakness of Ted and the seeming impossibility of doing anything to help him.

Early in the afternoon Wiley Fox disappeared, but he returned at dusk and called Bud and Stella aside to speak to them.

"Well, I've been up there," he said.

"Up where?" asked Stella.

"Where they've got the girl."

"Have you made any plans?"

"Yes, I've got a scheme, but I don't know how it will work out."

"What is it?"

"You know that Sunatee is on ther warpath with a [illegible] young bucks."

"Yes. What of it?"

"I think I see a way to make Sunatee help us out."

Bud and Stella looked at the cow-puncher in amazement. What did he mean? Sunatee was seeking to do Ted harm, rather than aid him. It had occurred to both of them that if Sunatee should be in their neighborhood

[illegible] Ted out of commission, and they [illegible] it was.

"Where is Sunatee? Is he in this neighborhood?" asked Stella.

"Yes, I saw him and his band this afternoon on Crow Butte."

"Why do you think he can help us out?"

"Sunatee wants to find Ted Strong. That's what he's out after. If he should find out that Ted Strong is up in a place I know on Crow Butte it's likely he'd go there, isn't it? He'd draw away the bunch, and it's a dangerous one, that is guarding the girl we want, wouldn't he? Then our chance would come to go and get the girl with the eyes and make her bring those boys out of their trance."

"It sounds good if it could be done, but can it?"

"I'm going to try. In that gang upon the butte is Harvey Fenton. He's an Indian-hater, and they hate him. He despises an Indian, and if they come monkeying around him he's going to chase them and get them. I'm going to sick the Indians onto Fenton."

Bud grinned. He was beginning to like Wiley Fox, in whom he saw a more than ordinarily clever chap. If he could do this thing Bud saw that they might have a chance to get into Fenton's stronghold, which Fox described as being unassailable even with a strong force. The only way to assail it was by diplomacy, and Fox seemed to be the one to accomplish it if any one could.

"I'll be back here before nine o'clock," said Fox, "and then I'll tell you what we will be able to do to-night."

Without further speech he left them and slipped off into the darkness.

In the course of an hour Fox appeared as silently as he had gone, striding into the light of the campfire.

"All right," he said to Stella, who rose at his approach. "The Indians are going to attack Fenton's fort at midnight."

"How do you know?"

"I have just come from Sunatee."

"How did you get him to take such a step?"

"I told him that it was Ted Strong's place, that Ted was there, and that if he would attack it he would capture not only Ted, but the girl, whom you call Miss Rossiter. I had to lie to do it, but it was to save Ted's life."

"And what are we to do?"

"We will be where we can rush upon the place as soon as Fenton leads his men away in pursuit of the Sioux. I have arranged all that."

"How could you do such a thing as that?" asked Stella in amazement.

"I told Sunatee that the only way to get Ted was to lure him into a pursuit, and when he got him far enough from the place on the butte—I told him where it was—he could capture Ted, and after that it would be easy for him to get the girl."

"You're certainly living up to your name, Mr. Fox," said Stella. "I hope everything will turn out as you have planned."

Shortly before midnight the camfire was extinguished and the young rough riders left camp silently on foot.

It was not far to the base of the Crow Butte, and the young rough riders were soon climbing its side through the stunted pines and the boulders, taking their way silently.

When they came near the summit Wiley Fox, who was guiding them, held up his hand and sent a low word back for them to halt.

It was a clear, starlit night, and they could see in the midst of a clearing in the pines a stone house of one story almost on the edge of the precipice.

"That house," said Fox in a whisper to Bud and Stella, "is only the entrance to an underground house that has an exit through the precipice. It is the headquarters of Fenton and his gang. Although it has been known for two or three years that he had such a place in the hills here, no one has been able to discover it until lately."

He did not say that it was he who was the discoverer, but Bud and Stella surmised as much.

"We will have to wait here a while until Sunatee begins to get in action," said Fox, "and in the meantime it is up to us to keep as quiet as possible."

Even as he spoke, they saw a man walk around the corner of the house.

Evidently he was a sentinel of some sort, for he carried a rifle over his shoulder and stopped every few steps to look around carefully.

He passed out of sight around the far end of the house and was not seen again for some time.

The house was dark, no lights appearing at any of the windows.

"Do you think there is any one in there?" asked Stella. "It seems to be deserted."

"Yes, they're all there, but they stay down [illegible] and only bring lights into the upper house when they want to go out or let some one in. See, there is a light now."

A faint crack of yellow light appeared, as if shine through a window, the blind of which did not fit [illegible] closely. In a moment it was gone, and then the door opened and a man came out. He whistled softly. The sentinel came around the corner of the house hurried and the two held a whispered conversation, and the man went in again, closing the door behind him.

"Yes, they're all there," said Fox, "and it's about the smoothest place you ever saw for their work."

"Hist! What was that?" Bud was listening intently, with his face turned down the side of the butte.

They heard a faint noise, as of men treading softly.

"It's Sunatee," whispered Fox. "Now the fun will soon begin, and after it gets started well our chance will come."

It was not long after that the boys could see the dim forms of men dodging behind trees and boulders, advancing stealthily toward the house.

The sentinel was not in sight, having passed around to the other side.

The advancing party were Indians without doubt, for the most part stripped of their blankets, but dressed in feathers and paint.

They had almost reached the house, and were in plain view of it, when the sentinel appeared, and saw them.

With a yell he discharged his rifle in their direction and ran toward the edge of the precipice, over which he suddenly disappeared.

His fright was almost ludicrous, but it was well founded, for he well knew that there was a standing enmity between those in the house and the Sioux Indians, and the sudden and stealthy appearance of a band of them in the middle of the night was not reassuring.

As the sentinel disappeared the Indians uttered a whoop that was enough to turn the blood cold.

It was answered by a shot from the house, and the Indians retreated a short ways and returned the fire.

But in a few moments they ran back to the house, continuing their yells.

From their hiding-place it was like a show to the boys, but they wished that it would end so that they might get into action.

Then they saw the streak of yellow light in the window again and their hopes rose. There would be something doing in a short time.

"Get down behind the rocks," muttered Fox. "The bullets will come in this direction if the party in the house opens fire."

They all crouched in places of safety just as the door swung open and a number of men dashed out with wild cowboy yells and the firing of rifles and pistols.

The bullets hit the ground all around the place where the boys and Stella were hiding, and then they ceased, for the Indians were running down the side of the butte as fast as they could go with the white men in pursuit, still yelling and shooting.

"Now is the time," said Fox, springing to his feet, for the shouts and the noise of the pursuit were dying away. "Follow me."

CHAPTER VII.

BEHIND BARRED DOORS.

"We haven't much time in which to do our work," shouted Fox, as he led a dashing charge across the clearing toward the house.

The door stood open, as it had been left by Fenton's gang when they started upon their chase of the Indians.

Fox dashed into the house, followed by Stella and the boys.

The room they entered was perfectly bare of furniture.

But in one corner burned a lantern, by the dim light of which they saw an open trap-door, and beneath it a flight of steps rudely carved in the rock.

"Here we are!" said Fox, picking up the lantern, and leading the way.

He began the descent of the steps, and Stella followed.

Behind came Bud with drawn revolver, and backing him were Ben and Kit, and the others.

All were prepared for action.

None knew what to expect, but from what Fox had told them of the sagacity of Fenton in constructing the place, they were prepared for anything that might happen.

None knew what defense Fenton might have left behind.

But they were surprised to find that there was no resistance.

The room they entered, apparently cut out of the solid rock of the butte, was untenanted.

It seemed but another entrance to the further strongholds of the gang.

At the far end was an iron door, heavily riveted, and apparently secure from all attack.

"We'll find her behind that," said Fox, springing toward it. "Fenton and his men may return at any moment. We must act swiftly."

They ran across the room to the door.

Fox tried to open it, but it was securely locked.

There seemed to be no way to open the door, for they had no tools with which to force it.

"What shall we do now?" asked Stella nervously, for she feared the early return of Fenton, before they would have time to accomplish what they had come for.

"I'll fix that," said Fox, who had been thinking.

He drew his .45, and placed the muzzle against the lock.

"What are you going to do?" cried Stella. "You will alarm everyone and spoil everything."

"No danger," answered Fox. "There will not be much noise, and anyway we can't help if there is. It is our only chance of finding what we have come for, the woman with the hypnotic eyes. If we don't get her you know what will happen."

"Shoot!" said Stella.

Fox pressed the trigger. There was a muffled roar, and the lock was shattered by the ball.

The door swung open and disclosed a lighted room.

At the same instant there was the flash and crash of a revolver, and, as Fox instinctively ducked, the bullet tore the hat from his head.

Something sprang upon him and bore him to the ground, and he was fighting for his life with a great, hairy hand at his throat.

The attack was so sudden that he had no time to prepare himself for defense.

Above him he saw a hideous face, with thick, leering lips; small, bloodshot eyes, and a low forehead, over which hung a thatch of coarse red hair.

It was the face of a monster.

The creature that was choking him to death was a dwarf as hideous as any of the pictures of the old artists who pictured the gargoyles, or water-spouts on the buildings of medieval architecture in Europe.

He was a perfect nightmare of a man.

While his body was short and squat, his arms were unusually long and powerful.

The grip of his large and hairy hand was like that of a vise, and Fox was being strangled.

Although he had struggled manfully, he was losing consciousness, for his struggles to breathe had almost ceased.

All this had taken place so quickly that Stella and the boys, who had been surprised into inaction at the shot from the revolver and the sudden leap out of the room of the hideous dwarf, had no thought of action until they suddenly realized that their unknown friend, Fox, was being strangled to death.

The doorway was narrow, and the boys in the rear could not see what was going on.

Stella stood in the doorway transfixed with astonishment, as well as horror, at the sudden attack of the dwarf, and stood immovably.

Bud was looking over her shoulder, but he, too, was so astonished at what had taken place that he made no move.

But suddenly it came to Stella that she must do something quickly.

She sprang forward. Her quirt hung by a thong from her wrist, and this was the first weapon that came to her mind.

Raising her arm above her head she brought the quirt down across the neck of the dwarf.

He winced as the lash stung him. But it was to him as the sting of a fly might have been, and he only turned his head to stare at the girl and utter a kind of cry such as an animal might have made when it felt the whip, but on his face was an expression of such terrible hatred that Stella shrank back with a cry to Bud.

The old cowboy had now begun to realize the situation, and he took Stella in his arms and passed her back to Ben, who, in turn, handed her to Kit.

In the meantime Bud had sprung forward, revolver in hand.

The monster on top of Fox was hideous enough to make anyone hesitate to approach him. But Bud saw at a glance that something must be done quickly if the life of Fox was to be saved.

He hesitated to shoot and kill the dwarf, as he might have done easily by placing the barrel of his revolver to his head and pulling the trigger.

The dwarf saw the hesitation and took advantage of it.

With a cry of baffled rage and hatred he sprang from the now inert body of Fox, who lay stretched out with blackened face and lolling tongue, his chest heaving laboredly for breath.

Across the room sped the dwarf, toward a door at the other side.

This door stood open, and Bud saw that the room beyond was small, and that probably it was the innermost stronghold of the gang, and that what they sought would be found there.

The place had been so constructed that the gang would be able to fight their way from place to place to this last resort. There they would find the woman whom they sought.

"Take care of Fox!" shouted Bud, as he sprang after the dwarf.

Still he did not like to shoot, although he might have brought down the dwarf, had he only cared to draw a bead on him and pull the trigger.

Ben and Kit were bending over Fox, who had been badly handled and was struggling for breath.

Stella was watching everything with wide open and frightened eyes.

"Oh, if only Ted was here!" was her thought, and then suddenly realized that if Ted were not in the condition he was at the moment it would not be necessary for any of them to be there.

Bud, in his pursuit of the dwarf, was met by a blow in the stomach by a flying chair which the dwarf, in his flight, had picked up and thrown behind him.

It came in so surprising a manner that Bud had not time to throw out his hands to stop it, and it floored him.

As he lay on the floor gasping and trying to struggle to his feet, the dwarf dashed through the doorway, and before he could rise to his feet he heard the crash of the door as the dwarf swung it to and turned the key in the lock.

"Stung!" shouted Bud, as he scrambled to his feet. "Now we're in a fix."

"Wait!" said Stella, holding up a warning hand. "What was that noise?"

They all stood in a listening attitude.

Above them they heard a stir of feet on a floor and the distant rumble of voices.

"Fenton and his men are coming back," said Kit.

"What will we do?" asked Stella, who, with a girl's horror of being trapped, saw that they were in a really perilous position.

"There's only one thing to do," said Kit, "and that's to fight it out."

"Sure," cried Stella, "we'll use the very tactics which they would have pursued. We'll hold the fort against them."

"But we've already destroyed one of the defenses by blowing the lock open," said Bud.

"True, but we'll go back and hold the other one," answered Kit. "Come on, fellows!"

They rushed back into the room at the foot of the stone steps.

"Who's got that lantern?" they heard a voice above shout.

It was Fenton, who, not suspecting that his place had been raided, though that some one had misplaced the lantern which Fox had taken to light the young rough riders into the cave.

At the foot of the stairs was a heavy iron door which the boys had found open when they made their descent.

In an instant it clanged shut and was fastened with an iron bar which stood against the wall.

There was a rush of footsteps on the stone stairs, and the boys could hear the voices of Fenton and his men cursing out their fear and doubt of what had happened.

"Palladio! Open the door!" they heard a voice call.

"What's the matter with that dwarf, anyhow?" came the same voice when there was no response.

Meantime the boys stood ready for the attack, which they were sure would follow when the men on the steps found that their way was barred.

Soon there were batterings on the door, which, however, subsided after a while, and Kit, who had his ear against the keyhole, could hear commands given in a low tone, and then the sound of feet retreating up the stairs.

Bud, who had fully recovered from the blow in the stomach, had gone to the door which the dwarf had closed behind him, and was trying to open it.

But it was constructed in the same manner as the others, with no handle or knob with which to open it, and only a lock, which would have to be broken.

Fox had recovered somewhat from his choking and was with Bud, making an investigation of the door.

"We shore got ter get inter this place," said Bud, "fer it's a cinch made o' hoss hair, which in other words, is a hairy cinch which can't be broke, that we won't be able ter git out ther other way."

"That's right," said Fox. "And, besides, behind the door is what we have risked all to find, and the other way out of the place. That's where Fenton's secret lies."

"Thar they come," said Bud, stopping to listen.

In the far room they could hear the clank of wood on iron.

"They're battering from the outside on the door at the foot of the stairs," said Fox. "It won't take them long to get it down."

"Then we may have time ter open this one, an' git in."

"That was the way Fenton had it figured out. He knew that if ever he was attacked, he could close that door, and, although it is not invulnerable, it would hold

the attacking-party long enough to enable him to get back here and away."

"They seem to be doing extry good work on that door howsomever," exclaimed Bud. "It's not goin' ter last much longer. Wait here a minute and guard the door. I'm goin' back ter give ther boys a pointer."

He ran through the two rooms to where the boys were guarding the outer door, and rapidly explained the situation to them.

"If ther fellers out thar manage ter git ther door down before I holler, fight 'em clear back ter ther door through which ther dwarf disappeared," he said. "Fox an' me is tryin' ter find a way ter git in thar."

"You bet we will fight them to the last stand," said Kit, as Bud went back to the inner door.

When he got back he found Fox tapping on the door with the butt of his revolver.

"Knockin' ter git in?" asked Bud, with a grin. "I reckon it'll take more'n that ter make em' open up."

"No," answered Fox, "I'm trying to find out how this door is fastened on the other side. There's more than a lock there.

"Anyhow, I'm goin' ter bust ther lock first, an' try ter find out what's ther matter, if that don't fetch it."

Bud, obedient to the sentiment, placed his revolver to the keyhole, and from the crash he knew that the lock had been shattered.

Still the door would not yield, but stood as obstinately immovable as before.

While Bud and Fox were still trying to force the door by pushing against it there was a great crash in the far room, and Stella came running to them.

There was a frightened look on her face as she ran up.

"They've broken in!" she cried. "Oh, what are we going to do?"

"Fight it out, I reckon," grunted Bud. "Thar don't seem ter be no other way ter git this door down, and the other, between us an' them, we fixed so it's no good ter ourselves. This yere door is barred on ther far side."

From the cries and the thud of blows in the far room, a sturdy fight was evidently in progress. Then there were a few shots, and the cries grew louder, mingled with an occasional yell of agony as some man was wounded.

"This can't go on much longer," muttered Fox. "If Fenton and his gang win out there won't be anything left of us except the inquest. They'll have us in a trap, and under the circumstances they'd be fools to let us get out of here alive."

They could hear the shouts of Kit and Ben above the others, and suddenly there was a rush as the young rough riders were driven from their place, and came running into the room where Stella and Bud and Fox were waiting at the closed door.

As the last of the boys ran into the room, Ben slammed the door in the faces of Fenton and his men, and threw his great shoulder against it.

Then the boys piled up against it to hold it.

Suddenly there was a clang behind the door through which the dwarf had fled.

It was the removal of an iron bar, and Stella and Bud and Fox looked at one another with hope in their faces.

Then the door swung open.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EXPERIMENT FAILS.

As the door of the room of the last refuge and escape of the Fenton gang was opened, Stella and Bud and Fox looked upon a beautiful woman, and, crouching behind her, the hideous form of the dwarf, whom Fenton had called Palladio.

For an instant they all gazed at one another inquisitively.

But the time for ceremony was short.

The boys were having a hard time holding the door against the force of men who were pushing and beating against it.

The woman in the doorway was strikingly beautiful.

She was tall and very dark. Her hair was thrown back from the forehead in a black mass, and hung in a heavy knot in the nape of her neck.

But the most remarkable feature of her face was her eyes.

They were a greenish gray, but they burned in the semidarkness as with a phosphorescent glow.

There was a fascinating and compelling power in them, and they seemed to impel anyone who looked into them to obey the unspoken wishes of her who owned them.

Without a moment's hesitation, the three followed her into the small room.

She had spoken with her eyes, and they had obeyed.

But once in, Bud suddenly remembered his comrades.

A glance at the dwarf, who still crouched behind the woman in an attitude of terror, recalled him to his senses.

The dwarf seemed no longer a creature of terror or horror, but of pity.

At a signal from the woman the dwarf sprang up and seized the iron bar, and she was about to close the door, when Bud interposed.

"Stop!" he cried. "There are the others! Come on, fellers! Make a run for it!"

The boys looked over their shoulders and saw what had happened.

At a nod from Ben they left the door suddenly and rushed across to the small room.

At the same time Bud pushed the woman with the hypnotic eyes out of the doorway, and seized the iron bar from the hands of the dwarf.

As the last of the boys ran through the doorway Bud slammed the door fast, and slipped the bar into place.

Simultaneously the Fenton gang swarmed through the open door the boys had deserted, and, seeing what had happened, rushed across the room with cries of baffled rage.

The young rough riders were safe for the time being.

The room in which they found themselves was about fourteen feet square.

In one end there was a couch covered with heavy rugs and pillows.

From the ceiling hung a heavy brass lamp that flobded it with radiance.

There was very little other furniture.

Stella had been looking around its walls, and discovered in one corner the opening to a passage.

Without attracting attention she walked toward this.

Through it Stella could see the sky and the stars, and a glimpse of the dark landscape below.

It seemed a great distance below, for, by the faint light of the stars and the new moon, she could see wooded hills and the gleam of a small stream.

It was the same view she would have had from the top of the butte.

She was recalled to the small chamber by a voice.

This rose above the clamor at the door. It was the same compelling voice that the boys had heard at the outer door, and which Fox had said was that of Fenton.

"Lydia! Lydia!" it kept calling. "Open the door, at once! I command it! Open the door!"

But the woman only laughed.

"I am free!" she murmured. "Now, I think I am free at last."

"Yuh bet yuh are, so far as anything we kin do fer yuh is concerned," said Bud Morgan. "All yuh got ter say is what is ther next move. We're some on ther move ourselves."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked the woman with the wonderful eyes, turning her gaze from Bud to Fox, then to Ben, and so around the circle, until, at last, they rested on Stella.

They impressed Stella with confidence rather than anything else, and the girl at once began to talk rapidly and to the point.

She related the circumstances of Ted having gone to the house outside of Chadron to rescue Phineas Ahasueras Blow, and how he had been hypnotized along with the first victim, and how they were likely to die if they were not soon rescued from their condition by the hypnotist who had thrown them into a trance.

As Stella was talking the woman with the wonderful eyes was nodding her head from time to time. Then she spoke.

"I remember something of it," she said at last, in a sort of vague faraway voice. "But it seems to me as if it happened a long time ago."

"Why, it was only the other night," said Stella.

"Perhaps, but I do not remember. I did not do it myself. I did it only because I was compelled to."

"What do you mean?" asked Stella.

"I was hypnotized by another when I hypnotized those boys. I understand it, now. I shall go with you and will do what I can, but I am afraid I will not be permitted to do so."

"I do not understand."

"I suppose not. I am a hypnotist only because one stronger than I has made me one, and controls my mind even as I control those of the boys whom I threw into a hypnotic condition. Before I can release them I shall have to be told to do so."

"But you say you are free now."

"That is only what I hope. But we shall see. I shall do all I can to free your friends."

"Then let us hurry away from here."

"By all means, let us go. If Fenton should get in here before we get away it would be all over with us all. He would command me the moment his eyes found mine. I fear him. I want you to take me away. That is why I opened the door."

"Did you know who we were?"

"No, but I had a feeling that Fenton was afraid of you, and I knew that any person of whom he was afraid might be my friend and a means of deliverance."

"We will be your friends if only you will help us to rid Ted Strong and young Blow of the spell you have put upon them."

"Come, then, we will go. We must hurry, for they may break in on us, and the way of escape is difficult."

Lydia, as Fenton had called the woman through the door, led the way to the passage Stella had investigated.

"This is the way out," she said. "You will find a rope ladder in a recess in the wall there, and rings in the floor to which to fasten it."

"How far is it to the bottom, miss?" asked Bud.

"Oh, I don't know, but it is a dreadful distance down. I cannot go down the ladder. I am afraid."

"I could never go down it either," said Stella. "I'd fall off before I was half-way down."

"All right," said Bud. "We'll lower you two to the ground by a rope, after one of us goes down by the ladder first to see that the way is clear, and that it is safe at the bottom."

They found the rope, and, after Kit and Ben had braved the dangers of the rope ladder and reached the bottom safely, a rope was tied around Stella and she was lowered to the valley, after which the woman with the hypnotic eyes went down in the same manner.

All the while the Fenton gang were battering on the door and firing their revolvers through it, in an attempt to hit some of those inside.

After the two women had been lowered to safety, the boys went down, one at a time, and they were soon at the bottom.

It was now almost morning, and under the direction of Bud they struck at once for the camp.

On the way Stella and Lydia, the woman with the hypnotic eyes, talked freely to one another.

Lydia told Stella how she had come to be the medium through which Ted and Blow had fallen into their hypnotic state.

"My name is Lydia Dodson," she said, "and I am a ranch girl, and the daughter of Tom Dodson, the ranchman. I have known Harvey Fenton for years. When I first met him I was a slip of a girl, not as old as you.

"He was a cowboy then, and a very good one, and was in my father's employ. He was always a peculiar fellow, given to investigating strange things, and when hypnotism first became talked about, he took a deep interest in it.

"One day at the ranch I heard him say to one of the men that he thought he had solved the mystery of hypnotism, and that he believed he could practise it.

"He had talked to me a great deal about it, and told me all that it meant, and what he believed a smart man could do with it in the way of making money by influencing the minds of other men to do what he wished them.

"Of course, being a young girl in school, I laughed at him first, and then came to believe in him as the smartest man in the country.

"He had succeeded in hypnotizing several of the

younger cowboys on the ranch, but not sufficiently to make any impression on the rest of us. Then he asked me one day if I would let him try to hypnotize me.

"I [illegible] at last he persuaded me to let him do so. But not until he had talked the matter over with my father, who thought Harvey the smartest young man in the country.

"'Let him try,' said father, 'let him try. I don't believe he can do it. You are as smart as he is, and it can't do you any harm if he does.'

"After that I made no objection, and Harvey experimented with me. At first his experiments were failures, and we all laughed at him, but he persisted, and one day he succeeded. After that I was his mental slave. All he had to do was to look at me and I was under his hypnotic influence.

"At first I was ashamed, but did not tell my father. Every day it got easier for Harvey to influence me. Then he tried a new experience. He tried the plan of hypnotizing other people through me."

"But how could he do that?" asked Stella, who was beginning to like Lydia Dodson, and was greatly interested in the recital of her experiences with hypnotism. Meanwhile they were walking toward the camp, under the protection of the boys.

"He would first hypnotize me, then will me to hypnotize whoever he wished, who could not be released until he had willed me again to do so. It was through this means that I hypnotized Ted Strong and Blow, under his direction. And that is the reason why I said I did not know whether I could get those boys out of their trance or not."

"But you will try?" asked Stella, anxiously.

"Of course I will. If I am not able to do so you will have to find Harvey Fenton and compel him to will me to do so."

"Let us hope you will be able to do so without that," said Stella fervently.

Not long afterward they reached the camp.

Everything was as they had left it.

The two boys were still in the tent, lying upon their cots in a state of suspended animation.

They were scarcely breathing; so low had their vitality gone.

As the boys looked in upon them they turned away sadly.

Ted was as pale as a ghost, and seemed a mere shadow of himself.

Blow was in no better condition. Indeed, he had less vitality than Ted, and was nearer death.

It was a horrible state of affairs, which they all felt, but none so deeply as Stella and Louise, who could not keep back the tears their fears forced from them.

"Come, you must do your best," said Stella, leading Lydia Dodson into the tent.

As the hypnotist looked down upon the victims of her devilish power over them, she grew pale, and a sigh escaped from her.

"Oh, if I could only be free from this," she exclaimed, "but leave me for a while. I will do everything in my power to revive them. If I am not able to do so, it will not be my fault, but that of Harvey Fenton, and if he can restore them you will have to compel him to will me to it."

They filed out of the tent, leaving the woman with the hypnotic eyes alone with the boys.

For half an hour she used the arts to which she was accustomed, in order to undo her hypnotic spells, and then she came from the tent.

"Well?" asked Stella eagerly.

"I can do nothing," replied the hypnotist. "They will not respond to my influence. I haven't the power to awaken them."

"But what shall we do?"

"You will have to find Harvey Fenton, bring him here, and compel him to will me to awaken them. Without that I can do nothing."

Stella uttered a groan, and Louise burst into a flood of tears.

The thing seemed impossible.

The boys stood about gloomily. Everyone of them would gladly have risked his life to bring Harvey Fenton to the camp. But of what avail would it be if they did get him there and he should refuse to will Lydia to bring the boys back to life again.

As they were in this condition the remarkable chap whom they knew only as Wiley Fox arose and prepared to leave the camp. He had been a real comfort to Stella, and all the boys believed and trusted in him now.

"Where are you going?" asked Stella.

"I'm going out to bring Harvey Fenton into camp and make him bring Ted Strong to life," answered Fox quietly, striding off into the darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

WILEY FOX SUCCEEDS.

"What's this comin'?" exclaimed Bud Morgan, about noon.

He, with the others, had remained in camp eagerly and hopefully awaiting the return of Wiley Fox.

The boys leaped to their feet and looked across the prairie.

"It's a squad of cavalry," said Kit, "and they're coming some."

"That's shore what it is, an' they've got a prisoner."

"Isn't that Fox with them?" asked Stella.

"I believe it is. By Jove, it is," cried Kit, "and I wouldn't be surprised if they had Fenton with them."

In a few minutes the cavalrymen galloped up, and a young lieutenant, who was in command, lifted his cap to Stella and Louise, and bowed to the boys.

Wiley Fox leaped to the ground from his horse, which he had evidently picked up at Fenton's headquarters.

With his arms bound behind him, a young man sat upon another horse, guarded on either side by a grim cavalryman with drawn revolver.

He was a dark man, with large and sullen black eyes which roved over the crowd of boys contemptuously. Then they began to search the camp. Evidently he was looking for Lydia Dodson.

But she was not in sight, being in the tent with the two boys, Ted and Blow.

"Well, we got him," said Fox, with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of the prisoner. "There's Harvey Fenton."

"How did you do it so soon?" asked Stella.

"As I was on my way to the stone house I came upon the band of Indians whom Fenton had pursued.

"They were at the foot of Crow Butte. They were in a terrible state of excitement, and when I arrived in their camp I saw that something quite out of the ordinary had happened. At sight of me, one of the young braves pointed to me and shouted in Sioux: 'That is the white man who led us into the trap, and caused the death of our young chief.'

"'What is the matter here?' I asked.

"'Ted Strong has killed Sunatee,' answered the Indian, 'and you led us to believe that we would be able to catch him.'

"It was a pretty tight place, for they were evidently enraged at the death of Sunatee, and were advancing on me with their rifles pointed at my breast. There was no denying that I had led them to attack Fenton's stronghold, but I had not looked for such an outcome. I held up my hand to let them know that I wanted to talk with them, and they stopped for a moment.

"'Brothers,' said I, 'it was not Ted Strong who killed your chief.' But they stopped me with cries of disbelief and rage.

"'Who killed him, then?' asked the brave who seemed to be in command.

"'It was Harvey Fenton,' I replied. 'It was the worst enemy the Indians have, the man with the black eyes.'

"At this they looked at one another in astonishment for a moment, 'But you led us to him, and now our Sunatee is dead,' cried the brave, and again they advanced upon me.

"I drew my revolver, intending to get as many of them as I could before they killed me, when suddenly we heard a bugle-call down the valley, and a troop of cavalry from Fort Robinson swung into the camp. You can bet I was glad to see the bluecoats.

"It was the same lot of troopers who had been detailed to keep track of old Buffalo Calf, Sunatee's father. They had been searching for Sunatee and his bunch of young warriors, and had just got information that they were at Crow Butte.

"Captain Follansbee, whom I happen to know, was at their head, and as he and his men drove the Indians away from me I knew that I was all right again.

"It did not take long for me to explain the situation to the captain, who was much surprised to hear of the presence of the Fenton on Crow Butte. He divided his men into three parties, one of which he left to guard the Indians, whom, of course, he at once put under arrest to be taken back to the reservation. With another force an attack was made on the stone house. The third squad went around the butte to intercept the gang should it attempt to escape down the cliff.

"I went to the house with the captain, and we had no difficulty in getting as far as the inner room, the door of which we found closed and barred.

"The captain announced to the men inside that the soldiers were outside, and demanded their surrender. But there was no response, and the soldiers began at once to batter the door.

"It did not take long to get the door down, and when we rushed in the room was empty, but we could hear shots on the plain below, and, leaving the place, rode around the butte to the foot of the cliff, and found that the men had been captured one by one as they came down the rope ladder. Among them was Fenton. The others we left with the troops, and here is Fenton. Now the trick is to make him release Ted and Blow from their hypnotic trance."

"Have you spoken to him about it?" asked Stella.

"No, I haven't. He doesn't like me any too well," answered Fox. "I'll leave that to you and the rough riders."

"We'll do the best we can, but if we don't succeed we will have to call on you. You have done so much already for us."

"All right. Anything I can do, I will." Fox walked away to talk to the lieutenant in charge of the squad, and shortly afterward Fenton was helped from his saddle, and told to sit on the ground near the tent.

Lydia had not shown herself, and Fenton was evidently worried.

It was apparent to Bud and Stella, who had assumed charge of the task of getting him to order the release of Ted and Blow from their trance, that he was greatly worried because she was not there.

They had placed him so that Lydia could hear all the conversation which passed between them.

After Fenton, who had a sullen expression on his face, had seated himself, Bud and Stella sat down beside him.

"See here, pard," Bud began, "you've played a low-down trick on Ted Strong and Blow in havin' them thrown inter this yere trance. We're wise ter how yer did it, an' we want yer ter undo it. Will yer?"

"What have you done with Lydia Dodson?" asked Fenton, looking at Bud with a sneer on his face.

"That's nothin' ter do with ther case. Will yer, or won't yer?"

"If I don't know where she is I can't. She seems to have told you all about it. If I don't know where she is I can do nothing."

"Oh, yes, you can," exclaimed Stella. "I know what you can do."

"Well, what can I do?" asked Fenton, turning his great black and sullen eyes on her.

"If you will her to release the boys she can do it."

"But I must see her or at least know where she is before I can do anything with her."

"That is not true. I know that all you have to do is to will her to do it, wherever she is, and she will have the power."

"How do you know that?" asked Fenton, with a sneer, which almost tempted Bud to strike him.

"She told me so."

"Then she is near here!"

"I have not said so."

"But she is. If I refuse, what are you going to do?"

"We'll make it pretty hot for you," said Bud, with a snap of his jaws.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Fenton. "You have nothing to do with me. You can prove nothing against me. What can you do?"

"What we can do with you we'll not split on, but what we'll do with Lydia Dodson will be a-plenty."

Bud said this with a very serious and determined air.

Fenton turned pale at this. Evidently he did not fear what might happen to him, being confident that he could take care of himself, but he feared for the safety of Lydia Dodson.

He thought a moment, and then said:

"If I do what you ask, what are you willing to do in return?"

"I reckon we'd better leave that until you do what we ask," said Bud, winking at Stella.

Fenton only smiled, and then seemed lost in thought.

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Bud, after an interval of several minutes.

Fenton did not reply. His eyes did not seem to see anything.

They were set in a rapt expression.

"He's working on Lydia," said Stella, in an awed whisper to Bud.

Stella had guessed the truth, for at that moment the flap of the tent was pushed back and Lydia walked out.

Her eyes were set, and she was looking fixedly at Fenton, who was watching her intently.

"So that's yer game, is it?" said Bud. "Well, she's here in our possession, jest ther same as you. If you've thrown her inter another o' them trances o' yours it won't do no good, fer she don't git erway until yer make her take ther spell off o' them boys. An', I want ter tell yer fair, it'll be a heap better fer you, my buck, if yer do it soon."

Fenton looked at Bud and laughed.

"I don't care now. I know she's safe. You can't do anything to her."

"Are you goin' ter order her ter take ther spell off'n them boys?" asked Bud in an ominous voice.

"No."

"Then I'm goin' ter give yer ther limit o' my ability, an' after ther young rough riders git through with yer ye'll be a picture no artist could paint."

But Fenton only smiled as he turned from Bud to Lydia, and, after looking at her intently for several moments, nodded to her and said something under his breath.

The woman with the hypnotic eyes approached him, and, kneeling suddenly, began to untie his hands.

It was a simple knot, and before anyone realized what was going on she had released him. He sprang to his feet and started to run.

"Stop, or we fire!" shouted the lieutenant, at the same time giving his men a sharp command.

There was the sharp click as the carbines came to a full-cock, but although he knew that death awaited him at the command "Fire!" Harvey Fenton kept on, running swiftly, and dodging and crouching as he did so.

The lieutenant was about to give the command to fire, when a cry rang out from Lydia.

Fenton heard it and stopped in his career. He looked over his shoulder, and saw that Bud had grasped the girl and was forcing her toward the tent. Some instinct of good in the man had been touched at the girl's cry, for he stopped short, and, after one glance at the leveled carbines of the soldiers came running back.

As he reached Bud, who had released the girl, Bud met him with a straight right-handed blow that sent Fenton to the ground.

"You're easier than I thought," said Bud. "I knew a holler from ther gal would bring yer back. Now that yere here, git up like a man an' take ther lickin' I'm goin' ter give yer. An' when I'm through with yer thar's several other o' ther rough riders what is goin' ter take a pelt at yer if yer don't immediate command that gal to undo them boys. D'yer understand?"

Fenton was on his feet in an instant.

He saw that he had been tricked, and was mad clear through.

Rushing at Bud he began to swing his fists, and he was a fighter.

But the golden-haired cow-puncher was somewhat of an expert himself, and as often as Fenton came up after a knock-down blow he was sent to earth again.

The boys and the soldiers stood in a ring around them, watching the encounter closely.

The girls had fled in terror to the tent at the first sign of the fight between the two men.

Lydia stood trembling, clinging to Stella.

She was clearly under the hypnotic influence of Fenton still, and while she seemed to know that something wrong was happening to her mental master she did not seem to care. Her only thought was of her own danger.

At last Fenton went down for the last time, and Bud stood over him waiting for him to rise.

"Got ernuff?" asked the old cow-puncher with a sardonic grin on his face.

He knew that his antagonist had had plenty, but he wanted to hear him say so.

Fenton merely nodded, and Bud stepped aside.

"Well, air yer goin' ter do what we ast yer to?" he said, as Fenton arose and felt of his jaw.

"I am not," answered Fenton positively.

"Yer ther most stubbornest man what ever I see," said Bud grimly. "I reckon ye'll have ter take Ben, thet big feller over thar, next."

Fenton looked ruefully as Ben Tremont threw off his coat.

But still he showed no disposition to obey Bud's request to command Lydia Dodson to release Ted and Blow from the spell she had cast upon them.

At this moment, just as Ben was advancing, Wiley Fox stepped forward.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I'm going to give him a knock-out blow myself."

He stepped close to Fenton and for a minute or two whispered in his ear. While he was whispering the expression on Fenton's face changed several times, and at the last it was the picture of terror.

Then he looked searchingly at Fox and nodded his head.

"He'll do what you want," said Fox, turning to the boys.

"Ye're somethin' o' a wizard yerself," said Bud, and the boys all gazed wonderingly at the disreputable-looking cow-puncher.

CHAPTER X.

MIXED BRANDS.

Lydia Dodson came running out of the tent.

She rushed up to Fenton and then stood quietly for a moment as he passed his hand in front of her face, and his lips moved, but no sound came from them.

At last the girl turned slowly from him and entered the tent.

Stella and Louise were with the boys.

They were both frightened at what had taken place, for they did not understand it.

As Lydia Dodson left the group Fenton started toward his horse.

"Wait a minute," said Fox, interposing, with his revolver in his hand.

"You said I might go when I had given the word," said Fenton.

"Sure, and you can. But I want to see that the goods are delivered first," said Fox. "You're in no hurry. A few minutes more or less cannot matter to you."

Fenton shrugged his shoulders and waited.

Every one of the group stood with their eyes riveted on the opening of the tent into which Lydia had gone.

Not a sound came from the tent, and none dared go there and look into it for fear of distracting the girl in the work they all hoped she would be able to do.

Every moment seemed an hour, but at last the flap was thrown aside.

Ted Strong stepped out.

A cheer went up from the boys at the sight of him, and they rushed forward to greet him.

But when they saw the look on his face they drew back.

Ted passed his hand over his eyes and swayed from weakness.

"That chap needs food," said Fox. "Get the cook busy."

Kit rushed away for McCann, the cook, who was soon busy preparing food.

It took only a moment for Ted to recover himself, and then he looked about him. He saw not far away Crow Butte looming against the sky, and it came to him gradually that this was not what had been before him when he went to sleep.

He was astonished, too, at his weakness and the eagerness of the boys to greet him. He was trying to collect his scattered senses. The sunshine dazzled him. He wondered why he felt so weak and dizzy.

"What has happened, boys?" he asked in a voice that was hardly distinguishable as his own. "Where am I?"

At that moment Louise came out of the tent. She was drying her eyes and smiling happily.

"Come, Ted," she said, taking his arm within her's and leading him to a seat within the shadow of the tent. "I will tell you all about it."

Ted staggered as he walked with her, and sat down like a sick boy.

The boys did not interfere. They knew that Louise would tell him everything in a way that he would understand.

In the meantime there had staggered from the tent the gaunt form of Phineas Ahasueras Blow.

He looked like a scare-crow. His clothes hung about his already attenuated figure in folds, and his pale face was paler and thinner than ever.

As the smell of the cooking from McCann's fire greeted his nostrils he murmured, "Gimme some ham and eggs," and fell in a faint.

"Well, how about it?" asked Fenton, who had been standing under the fear of Fox's gun while all this was going on.

"I told you you could go as soon as Ted Strong and that other chap were out of danger. Go! But don't let me catch you again. This won't count then."

"But how about Lydia?"

"She stays here, after you have released her from the power you have put over her."

Fenton cursed beneath his breath.

"None of that," said Fox. "Do as I say, or——"

He looked Fenton squarely in the eye. The hypnotist turned away.

In a moment he looked back.

"All right," he said. "Bring her here."

"Don't try to get away from me, Fenton," said Fox. "Stay where you are and I will bring her. Then do what I want you to. After that go as far as you like."

Fox went into the tent and in a few moments returned, leading Lydia Dodson by the hand.

Fenton stood where Fox had left him. Evidently he feared this mysterious and disreputable-looking cowpuncher.

Fox placed the girl before Fenton, then gave him an inquiring glance.

Fenton snapped his fingers before the girl's eyes and said something which was inaudible, and she was suddenly changed.

"That will do," said Fox. "There is your horse. Vamose!"

Fenton turned on his heel, walked rapidly to his horse, climbed into the saddle, and rode away.

The lieutenant of cavalry, who had witnessed all this, nodded his head to Fox and smiled, but did not attempt to interpose any objection to his prisoner's departure.

What it all meant was a mystery to the boys, who silently observed it.

McCann had cooked enough food for a regiment, and was ready to serve it.

Ted had, in the meantime, recovered his strength with the knowledge of events which Louise had imparted to him, and Blow was recovering his strength and good spirits under the care of the boys.

With his usual good sense Ted partook at first very sparingly of the food McCann had prepared, and helped restrain the appetite of Blow, who was ravenous, and would have eaten everything in sight at first had he not been restrained.

Before the day was over Ted was picking up his strength and vitality, and, after a good night's sleep, he was as good as ever.

Blow recovered more slowly, as he had not lived the open life of the plains, nor had he had the exercise that had made Ted Strong the athlete he was.

Ted went at once to Wiley Fox when he was fed and rested, and thanked him for his services in rescuing him from the hypnotic spell which had been put upon him.

"That's all right, Ted," said Fox. "You've been a good fellow to me in the past. Forget it. It's what you would have done for me had the circumstances been reversed."

"Perhaps I would," said Ted. "At any rate, you have done me as great a favor as one fellow could do for another. I wish you would join us in this little expedition on which we are going to get the bunch of Sawbuck cattle, which belongs to our eccentric friend Blow, to his ranch. What do you say? Come, if you have nothing else to do."

"Sure, I'll go with you," answered Fox.

You may be sure there was great rejoicing in the camp of the young rough riders that night as they sat around the fire and talked over all the worries through which they had passed since Ted had gone to the house on the edge of Chadron and had fallen under the hypnotic spell of Lydia Dodson.

After Fenton had released her from his power the girl was almost prostrated, but Stella and Louise were as sisters to her, and she had recovered sufficiently next day to be sent to her father's ranch under the care and guidance of two of the young rough riders, with a letter from the King of the Wild West to her father explaining all the circumstances.

"Now for the herd," said Ted the next morning.

He had awakened well and refreshed from a good night's sleep and the relief from the effects of the hypnotic spell that had been put upon him.

Of one thing he was determined—to undo the fraud that Fenton and his partners had put upon Blow.

Fenton had escaped, but only temporarily.

Ted's first order, after Lydia Dodson had been sent to her father, was to take up the march again to the White River, where they expect to meet the Sawbuck herd of cattle.

Camp was broken, and soon afterward the march taken up to the White River.

On the way Ted observed the trail of a large herd of cattle that had recently passed.

At first it was thought that it was the Sawbuck herd, and Ted wondered why the trail was so fresh, for Blow had told him that his cattle should have passed several days before, and were now at the White River or beyond.

Later in the day they came upon several strays, and Ted rode up to them and examined the brands.

"See here, Blow," he called to the tenderfoot cattleman, "what are your cattle doing away back here? These are some of the Sawbuck cattle. That's your brand, isn't it?"

He pointed to a faint brand on a cow.

It looked like two X's joined by a bar.

"Yes, that's my brand—a sawbuck," answered Blow.

"Then what are these cows doing away back here?" asked Ted.

"That's what puzzles me. They ought to be a good many miles ahead of this."

"You must have a dandy foreman. He shouldn't have let strays get this far behind in this country."

"I don't understand it." Blow was looking curiously at the little bunch of strays. There was a perplexed frown on his homely face. "That looks like my brand, and—yet it somehow doesn't."

"Great Scott, don't you know your own brand?"

"Sure I do. I saw it often enough when I was going through and counting my herd."

"All right, then. We'll just pick up these strays and drive on until we catch up with the herd. But I'd get a new foreman if I were you."

The strays were gathered up and pushed ahead of the outfit, and during the day the boys kept picking up others until they had a bunch of about twenty-five of them.

All bore the brand of the sawbuck, apparently. Still Ted was worried about it. It looked like the sawbuck, and yet for all he knew it might be another brand altogether, and it would look bad if they were picking up the cattle belonging to a ranch in the neighborhood and driving them away. It would be an awkward thing to explain.

The brand was not a familiar one to him, and he did not know of any such in that part of the country, where it was his business to know every man's brand as well as his face and his reputation.

Besides, the cattle did not look like northern beeves, and they appeared as if they had been on a long drive. They were lean and wild.

However, the herd that Blow had bought from Dodson under the sawbuck brand were lean cattle, and it had been the young fellow's intention to drive them to the ranch he had bought from Fenton and Quirk and fatten them.

But the idea was growing on Ted that there was something about it all that was mysterious. The oftener they picked up a stray in a coulée here or at a water-hole there, which they were constantly doing, the more puzzled Blow seemed to be over the brands on them.

If it was his herd that was running loose about the country there was only one thing to think. The herd had been deserted and had scattered.

This was Ted's idea, and he saw in prospect a large job in scouring the country gathering together the scattered herd, or as much of it as had not been misappropriated and driven off, and perhaps sold or shipped out of the country.

Probably, he thought, Blow's foreman and cow-punchers had deserted the herd when their employer did not appear when he promised.

At all events it looked as if their work was well cut out for them if they were to save anything to Blow.

They now had about fifty head of cattle in their bunch of strays when, as evening approached, they saw coming toward them from the west two horsemen.

One was an ordinary Western cow-puncher, the other a gaily-decked Mexican vaquero.

The boys looked astonished at the appearance of the Mexican—he was so unusual in the northern country.

They had seen many of his kind in New Mexico and farther south, and a Mexican and a vaquero was no new sight to them. But here in the shadow of the Black Hills a Mexican was not an usual visitor, not but that very often southern cattle had been driven to the northern ranges by the fellows from the south, but it seemed out of place at the time.

It was not long before the Mexican and the cow-puncher rode up to the outfit.

The Mexican was a handsome fellow. He was dressed in the characteristic Mexican costume, with slashed trousers held by a red silk sash and trimmed down the sides with silver buttons, and his head was topped with a heavy sugar-loaf sombrero lavishly trimmed with silver.

This he removed with a sweeping bow as he brought his horse to its haunches in front of the party.

"Ah, I see that the señors have been so kind as to pick up my stray cattle and bring them forward," he said with a flash of his white teeth. "I assure you that I am grateful to the señors."

He was so pleasant about it that the boys smiled in return.

"These are not your cattle," said Blow. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but they belong to me. They are strays from my herd, which is on the White River."

"The señor is mistaken," said the Mexican. "These cattle belong to the X — X brand, as you will see if you will take the trouble to observe. That is the herd which I am driving into Wyoming."

He was not so smiling now, and when he bared his white teeth it was with a sneer.

"Where is your herd?" interrupted Ted, looking at the Mexican.

"It is on the White River at this moment," was the reply.

"I guess we'll keep this bunch until we get to the

White River, then," said Ted. "They look to me as if they belonged to the Sawbuck herd. Vamose!"

CHAPTER XI.

A TEST OF HONOR.

The Mexican flashed a look at Ted, then turned, beckoning to the cow-puncher to follow him.

But he looked over his shoulder to say to Ted:

"Very well, señor, for the present. But we shall see how you will be permitted to take the cattle of another in this way. The cattle you have are mine, and I shall get them yet."

"On your way," said Bud, riding up to him. "This is a square outfit, and if the cattle air your's you'll get them. But we're from Missouri, an' you'll have ter show us."

"It's all right, Bud," said Ted, laughing. "Let him go. This is not the time to argue the matter with him. When we get to the White River we will see if he has a herd with a brand like this and then we will find the Sawbuck herd, if it is there, and compare brands. The whole proposition has a queer look to me. What do you think?"

"It shore is some queer. I don't know this yere Sawbuck, nor I ain't none acquainted with the X — X brand in this part o' ther country. But—wait a minnit!"

There was a strange expression on Bud's face.

"Well, what is it?" asked Ted, smiling at the old cow-puncher.

"Say, I do know a X — X brand," said Bud, with a look of comprehension dawning on his good-natured countenance.

"Where?"

"Down in Texas, on ther banks o' ther Rio Grande."

"What has that got to do with this?"

"I was jest wonderin'——"

"What?"

"If this could be ther same brand, an' from ther same ranch."

"What of it?"

"Don't yer see? This sawbuck brand o' Dodson's is as like the X — X as two looks like two."

"Uh-uh! A sawbuck is made of two X's joined closely by a bar. The X — X is made by an X, a bar, and another X, and they are not joined."

"You're a wise boy. But when they are old brands how air they goin' ter be distinguished apart? Answer me that."

"That ought to be easy enough if a fellow knows anything about reading brands."

"Well, from ther looks o' things we'll git a chance to find out!"

Nothing more was said on the subject, but it gave Ted food for thought as they rode along.

They went into camp that night, as the herd was not [illegible] and far [illegible] camp[illegible] and the cow-puncher [illegible] claim the strays.

[illegible] guarded the bunch of strays, for they had [illegible] the matter of a [illegible] and so did Blow. [illegible] determined to hold them until the matter was settled.

In the morning they took to the trail again and about noon came within sight of the White River.

On the farther side they could see a large herd of cattle grazing, and it appeared that there were an unusual number of cowboys for even so large a herd. And, as they drew nearer, they could see that among them were a number of Mexicans, who could be distinguished by the gay apparel they wore, and the serapes which flew behind them, fluttering in the wind as they dashed here and there on their horses.

When they got to the river they forded and went into camp.

Less than a quarter of a mile away was the herd.

"Let's take a run over there and look the herd over," said Blow.

"All right," answered Ted. "Come on, Bud. We'll see what this outfit looks like."

"Gee! There's my foreman," said Blow, as they rode up to the herd, pointing to an alert-looking cow-puncher who sat on his horse talking to the Mexican who had claimed the strays the evening before.

"Hello!" said Blow, riding up to him. "What does this mean? You seem to have increased your herd since I saw it last."

The young cow-puncher, who was foreman of Blow's herd, did not return Blow's grin.

"I reckon I have, but it ain't none o' my likin'."

He was evidently angry.

"What's the matter?" asked Blow.

"Well, I was waitin' here for you to come along, as you promised several days ago. I ought to be away ahead by this time. You didn't come ner send me no word, an' this gent, who says he's Señor Don Pedro Quinones, of Mexico, heaves in sight with a bunch o cattle which he says he's drivin' up to Wyoming."

"The señor is right," answered the Mexican, with a smile.

"I have the right to the range, bein' here first, an when he comes to other side o' the river I goes over an' tells him to drive along east or west before he crosses."

"That was right," said Ted.

"There's a good crossing above or below, but he don't see it that way. While me an' him is chinnin' about it his crazy greasers start his beeves across, an' before we can do anything to stop 'em they're over, an' mixin' with our herd."

"Well, that won't make any difference," said Blow with happy optimism.

"Won't, eh? You wait and see."

"Why didn't you get on the bank and drive the cattle back as they came over?" asked Ted.

"A big bunch was over before we got onto them. I was talkin' the matter over with the boss here when his men started them into the river. Of course there was some scraps between his men and ours, but that didn't do no good, for the cattle were all mixed up before we could keep them apart."

"Well, that's nothing more than some extra work," said Blow. "We'll all turn in and cut the herd apart. We'll round out his cattle to the east and ours to the west. That will be easy."

"Well, eh? Just ride into that herd and look at them. If you can tell who's is who's I'll eat my goatskin chaps, hair an' all."

The foreman turned away in disgust, and the Mexican, whom he had called Pedro Quinones, smiled maliciously.

Evidently here was the secret of the fifty or more strays the boys had picked up.

Ted and Bud rode into the herd.

Apparently every one of the cattle belonged either to the sawbuck brand of the X — X brand.

"Well, if this don't take the whole bakery I'm a ninny," said Bud, as they proceeded through the herd. "Here's two different bunches o' cattle, but I'll be dinged if I could tell the difference betwixt ther brands."

"It's a pretty hard proposition," said Ted, who was thinking deeply. "There's either a trick here, or it's the most remarkable coincidence that ever happened in the cattle business."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you see? Here's a bunch of northern cattle, lean and waiting to be fattened, branded with a sawbuck, which you know. Along comes another bunch, lean from the long drive, branded with the X bar X. Nearly all the brands are old. How are you going to tell them apart?"

"Jumpin' sand-hills, that's so. I never thought o' that."

"It looks like a trick to me."

"I wisht ye'd erlucidate. My top piece is none too good at it."

"Well, this Pedro Quinones comes up from the south with a herd of cattle and deliberately mixes in with a herd of a tenderfoot which is branded almost the same. Who is going to tell which of the cattle belong to him. I tell you I don't like that fellow Quinones. He's a greaser and full of tricks. But I don't believe he's the chief mover in the thing."

"Then what do you think?"

"I think this is only another part of a scheme to do our friend Blow to a finish."

"In what way?"

"Well, they tried to do him on the ranch, if they haven't already succeeded. Dodson tried to do him on the cattle he bought, and this is only the second move in the game."

"Still I'm up in the air so far as seein' what yer drivin' at."

"The ranch may be there, we'll find out later, but Fenton and Quirk and Dodson were all in on the deal to bleed Blow and his friends on this cattle-ranch proposition. First they tricked him by handing the ranch over to him, minus the cattle. Then he buys this bunch of sawbuck cattle from Dodson. Along comes another bunch with an almost identical brand and mixes in while he's away."

"Ther light is beginnin' to dawn."

"Well, why is he away?"

"Because he's lyin' hypnotized in a house near Chadron."

"Sure, but before that he comes to us to help him, and when that is found out I am dragged into the same trap. But they did not figure on the resourcefulness of the rough riders."

"I see. It is Fenton who sells the ranch an' does him out o' ther cattle. It is Dodson who sells him this bunch. Dodson's girl hypnotizes him and you, and it is Fenton who does the trick both times. I'm kinder stuck on Fenton. I'm sorry he got away from us so easy."

"We'll find him again. Now what do you think of it?"

"I think Fenton is a pretty slick article, myself. But a scoundrel like that can't go on forever."

"No, we'll trap him. If it hadn't been for Wiley Fox, though, we'd shore been up against it when you was laid out. Say, he's not only wise, but he's a good fellow."

"He's certainly wise about a lot of things. It seems to me that I have seen and known him before. There's something in his voice and eyes that I seem to know. Hello, what's doing over there at the camp?"

A small party of horsemen had ridden up to the camp, and the boys seemed to be excited.

Ted saw that Kit was motioning him back to camp.

"Come," he said to Bud, "let's ride back to camp and see what the commotion is all about."

They made their way through the mixed herd again, and as they rode up to camp Ted was astounded to see that one of the arrivals was Fenton, and that another was Dodson, whom he knew by sight.

"Well, to what are we indebted for this visit?" asked Ted, as he rode in.

"We've come to get our herd of cattle, the X bar X," said Fenton superciliously. "When we get here we are told that a man by the name of Blow claims them."

The secret was out.

Ted looked from Fenton to Dodson with a smile.

"Gentlemen," he said, "if you can take care of your [illegible] all right, but be very careful to get only your own."

"What do you mean?" asked Fenton [illegible].

"I mean that I'm onto you bigger than a brick house. This is the third move of a carefully planned scheme to swindle Mr. Blow and his friends out of their money on this ranch and cattle deal. But be careful. Mr. Blow has asked me to manage this affair for him, and—well, I'm no tenderfoot. I've been punching cattle and running down criminals in this neck of the woods for some time."

"What do you mean?" blustered Dodson. "Do you mean to insinuate that I am a criminal, sir?"

"Time will tell, but I don't propose that you shall be, so far as Mr. Blow is concerned. By the way, I thought that those X bar X cattle belonged to Pedro Quinones."

"They did, but we bought them from him."

"When?"

"It is none of your business, but I will say that they were bought several days ago."

"Well, it makes no difference whether they have always been yours or whether they were bought five minutes ago, if you drove them into the sawbuck herd deliberately. If you can pick out yours, do so, but be careful not to take anything that does not belong to you."

The men rode into the herd, and soon came back.

"I can't see but that the whole herd belongs to us," said Dodson. "If Mr. Blow will call his men off guard we will drive them away."

The very audacity of the thing made Ted throw back his head and laugh.

"Well, you certainly have your nerve," he said. "Why, you sold more than half that bunch of cattle out there to Blow yourself under the sawbuck brand. Then you claim that you have bought a herd of X bar X cattle from this greaser, and he has mixed the herds. Now you claim them all. Mr. Dodson, you are the limit."

"See here, young fellow, don't you dare talk to me like that," shouted Dodson. "If you do I'll break you in two across my knee."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Ted quietly. "But I'll send you to the penitentiary if you are not careful. You haven't a tenderfoot to deal with now. There are two herds of cattle in that bunch, and one of them belongs to Mr. Blow, and you bet he's going to get it, and Ted Strong and the young rough riders are going to help him do it."

A look of bafflement passed over the faces of Dodson and Fenton.

They rode away a short distance and entered into a long and serious discussion.

When they came back they said to Ted:

"Mr. Strong, we realize that there has been a mistake here. There are two brands of cattle in that bunch, and some of them belong to us. We didn't expect you to be mixed in with this. But we know that you are on the square, and we will leave it to you to go into that herd and separate it. It is a big job, but it is the only way out of the tangle we can see. We'll take your word. It is a test of honor, and we believe you are equal to it."

CHAPTER XII.

[illegible]

Ted was somewhat taken aback by this proposition of Dodson's.

He did not quite understand the drift of it, but at that he saw that it would be the safest way to get [illegible] belonged to Blow, so after thinking the matter over for a moment he accepted the proposition.

After a consultation with [illegible] agreed that it would be the wisest thing for him to accept the [illegible].

He knew that his reputation for fairness was being worked on by the sharpers to their own advantage, for they were aware that if he would accept the responsibility, any disadvantage there would be in Ted's decision would be to his friend Blow.

It was sure that Ted would throw the balance in favor of Dodson and Fenton.

But before he accepted the position of arbiter he told Blow that he would not act in his favor.

"If I am going to undertake this," he said to Blow, "I'm liable to give you the worst of it, rather than them. When it comes to a point that I'm not dead sure of I'm going to throw it to them."

"That's all right, Ted," replied Blow. "I put you into this, and whatever you say goes. I'll take my [illegible]."

Ted went to Dodson and Fenton therefore and said that he would accept the position of cutting the herd in two.

To this Quinones, the Mexican, who had not been brought into the matter, objected. He was [illegible] that he had not been asked his opinion in the matter, and he rather [illegible] the cutting out himself.

But Dodson and Fenton, with many sly looks between themselves, were firm that Ted should do the work, but suggested to Ted that the Mexican, being familiar with the cattle of the X bar X herd, might be allowed to assist him.

"Very well, he may make suggestions," said Ted, "but if I'm to be responsible for it I'm not going to be bound by any of them."

"That's all right," said Dodson. "It's up to you to do the job, and we'll leave it to you."

Quinones swore a Spanish oath under his breath at this, and Ted turned to him sharply, and said:

"See here, Quinones, cut that out. I understand Spanish as well as you, and if you are going into this thing at all you are going in on the square. I'll treat

you as well as you treat me, but no better. You are a trickster, as you showed when you drove your herd across the river and mixed with another man's, and I shall keep my eye peeled for you. If you understand that I mean you can ride into the herd with me, otherwise, keep out."

"I assure you that I am highly honest in my intentions," said the Mexican with a flash of his white teeth. "It shall be as the señor desires."

"Look out for that greaser," whispered Fox as Ted passed him.

"Why?" asked Ted.

"He's got it in for you. He has a knife in his belt, and he's a bad actor. I've heard of him before."

Ted looked at the disreputable cow-puncher in amazement. The chap seemed to know something about everything and everybody. But he nodded to Fox and murmured that he would be careful.

They rode into the herd together, followed by the young rough riders and Blow's cow-punchers in one body to take care of the cattle Ted would select as belonging to the sawbuck brand; and by the Mexicans to cut out those which were decided to belong to the X bar X brand.

As Ted rode along he pointed out a cow and motioned to Blow's foreman, who sent in a man to cut it out. Next he would tell Quinones that a cow was his, and it was cut out.

The difficulty in the matter was to tell where the hair had grown in between the bar and the X on either side, or vice versa, making it necessary for Ted very often to examine the brands very carefully.

This seemed to annoy Quinones, who would point out a certain cow or steer and claim it, saying that he knew it was his.

But before allowing this Ted would always examine it.

This would cause the Mexican to exclaim impatiently, but although it annoyed Ted he took no apparent notice of it, although he looked warningly at Quinones several times.

Thus the count went on monotonously all day, one cow for this side, a steer for the other.

When Ted was in doubt he always listened to what Quinones said, and called in the other boys to help him decide.

At last they broke on a fine red steer.

Ted was positive that it had a sawbuck branded on its flank.

Quinones was sure that it was the X bar X brand.

"Señor, I know that steer," he said. "That was always my favorite of the herd."

"Then it's mighty strange that it had a sawbuck branded on it," said Ted.

"Señor, you are mistaken. That is X bar X."

"Say, do you know this steer?" Ted called to Blow's foreman.

The foreman rode up and took one glance at the animal.

"Sure, that's Reddy. He was the leader of the herd. I know him as well as I do one of my own boys. And any one of them knows him as well as he knows his brother. There's his sawbuck branded into his hide."

"Then take him along," said Ted, waving his hand toward the red steer.

"I protest," cried Quinones, excitedly. "The steer belongs to our side. You shall not take him."

"We will all the same," said Blow's foreman, as he cut the steer and began to drive it away.

"I told you that I was the arbiter in this discussion," said Ted to the Mexican. "I've already given you by far the best of this thing, for I've turned over to your men several head that I thought belonged to Blow, but was not absolutely sure about, but rather than entertain the doubt I've given you the benefit of it."

"Oh, I don't know," retorted the Mexican, angrily. "I noticed that you have always chosen the best of the cattle."

"You know better than that, Pedro," said Ted, who had grown very pale. It had been said in the presence and hearing of the boys and the Mexican vaqueros, and the latter were showing their teeth in slight smiles of derision.

"I have seen it, and my men have seen it," shouted Quinones excitedly. "If it continues in this way I will get none of my fine cattle."

"Take that back, Quinones, or get out of the herd."

Ted was very angry, and there was a warning look in his eyes.

"I will not take it back, for it is true," said the Mexican with an insolent smile, and a significant look at his men who began to move closer to him.

They were riding side by side, and as the Mexican said this Ted's hand flew out and the back of his gauntlet slapped across the Mexican's cheek with a crack that could be heard by all.

Every man's hand went to the handle of his weapon.

The Mexican grew livid with rage.

He ripped out a Spanish oath, and drew his knife so swiftly that Ted had no chance to strike him or otherwise defend himself.

The Mexican's arm went into the air, and the knife was about to descend. Had it's aim been true Ted's life would have been ended.

But at that moment Bud rushed his pony at that which Quinones was straddling, and struck it full tilt on the shoulder.

As a result the knife missed Ted's neck, for which it had been aimed, and cut a gash along his coat-sleeve.

They were on the edge of the herd, and as this happened Quinones dug his cruel Mexican spurs into his horse and dashed out of it and away.

Ted did not hesitate a moment, but dashed after him.

Quinones had a good start, but Ted was mounted on Sultan.

Occasionally Quinones looked over his shoulder to see how close Ted had come to him.

Ted saw him draw his revolver and rump in his saddle.

Throwing himself far along Sultan's neck Ted avoided the ball intended for him as the Mexican fired.

"I'll catch him some other way," thought Ted as he straightened up again and saw that the Mexican was now bent on escaping rather than fighting.

He spoke to Sultan, and the little black stallion stretched himself out.

Sultan knew that it was to be a race now, and he was keen for it.

Quinones looked over his shoulder again and saw that the duel had done no harm, and he shoved his revolver into his holster and settled himself down for a race. He had a good lead, and his horse was larger than Sultan; therefore, he thought that it would be an easy matter to run away from the black stallion.

But he did not know Sultan.

Foot by foot the black stallion crept upon the Mexican's horse.

Behind him Ted could hear the sounds of battle. There were shouts and the ring of shots, and above it all he could hear the exultant yell of Bad Morgan, and knew that things were well for the Moon Valley outfit.

He was gaining on Pedro, but he had not yet forced Sultan to his utmost.

"Now, boy, go for him," he said at last, and the little black stallion shot forward like a rocket.

As Ted dashed past he seized the tail of Pedro's horse, wrapped it quickly around his saddle horn and, without checking speed, turned the Mexican end for end.

The Mexican's horse was in the air when Ted seized its tail and it staid there until it landed on its side on the prairie and rolled over and over, the most astonished horse in the country.

Pedro flew from its back with the momentum and he, too, rolled along until he stopped, stunned.

It had all happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that the Mexican had no way of defending himself against this, the most effective, yet most difficult feat of cowboy horsemanship.

Leaving Quinones to his fate Ted galloped back to the herd.

When Quinones had attempted to assassinate Ted the Mexicans prepared for war, and the young rough riders were not slow to take the challenge, but the fight was short, if swift.

A few blows were struck, a few shots fired and the cowardly Mexicans took to their heels, and were chased from the scene by the American boys with exultant Moon Valley yells.

"How it was all done" Ted explained to the boys, "I couldn't tell you, for it happened so quickly it all seemed like a dream."

In the pick and hand fight that followed, Ted had had his left hand shot, Bad Morgan had received a bullet in his shoulder, and Fenton had received a bullet in his hand.

"I could not believe," said Ted, "it might seem to you that the point of a gun, though they are very handy, I suppose, some of your girls are good shots but if they are I couldn't believe on them."

"You do, all right, Ted," said Bob. "For some reason we lost the loss of only a hundred head. If it hadn't been for you I'd have lost the whole herd. I'm grateful for what I know."

After the same Fenton came blustering up to Ted and said:

"I of course we've got to take some detention on this affair on account of you, but I don't think we've got all those cattle back."

"Now look, Fenton," said Fox, pushing his way in. "I told you that the next time we met it wouldn't be well for you."

"You here?" said Fenton. "I thought you'd gone away."

"No, I knew you'd butt into this deal again, and so I came along to be on hand when you did."

"Who are you, and what do you want bothering me anyway?" asked Fenton bristling up.

"Do you know me now?" Fox stripped off the false wig he wore, and the long cow-puncher mustache, and there stood Darby O'Neill, the United States Secret Service agent.

"I want you for a number of things, Fenton, but principally for counterfeiting and robbing United States mail-trains. If you care to hear for what other crimes I have a list as long as your arm."

Fenton had been backing away, and suddenly drew a revolver.

Before he had time to use it, however, Ted had stepped quickly behind him and wrenched it from his hand, while Darby O'Neill, with a smile and a nod of thanks to Ted, slipped a pair of handcuffs upon the counterfeiter's wrists.

The rest is soon told. Ted and the boys helped Bob and his cow-punchers drive the sawbuck herd to the new ranch which they found was there in spite of Ted's doubts, and before returning to Moon Valley saw that the reckless ranchman was safely established in his new home.

THE END.

The next number of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, No. 126, will be entitled, "King of the Wild West's Long Drive; or, Still On the Staked Plains." It tells how Strong and his girl pard, Sadie Faulkin, as well as the faithful comrades, went into the southwest, where all had some exciting adventures in a land that has always been shrouded in mystery and romance.

A CHAT WITH YOU.

EDITORIAL NOTE.—The deluge of letters of praise pouring into our editorial rooms has impelled us to open this department, where, from week [illegible] our multitude of enthusiastic y[illegible] sports afield. If you [illegible] anything connected with outdoor life, hunting, fishing, [illegible] or cowboy life on the plains, ask freely, since on our staff we have [illegible] who are thoroughly posted in all that pertains to [illegible] life. In many cases we may have to abbreviate letters; but it shall be our aim to print everything that we believe must prove of interest to the great body of our readers.

SPECIAL NOTICE—Owing to the great number of letters still coming, and the unabated interest shown in connection with our cash prize competition, we have concluded to extend the time a month or two, so that every boy may have a chance. If you have up to now failed to enter your letter in the contest, there is still time to do so. We shall positively print the full name and address of every prize winner in this column, when the competition has closed.

I am a reader who lives way down in Arizona. It is quite a distance from the city where my favorite weekly is published. It [illegible] in this country where a good many of the things which Mr. Ned Taylor writes about happen to the rough riders. I live in the city of Prescott, and have been here for some time. I have been pretty much over the whole State at various times. During my recent travels over the alkali-beds I came across a number of the Navajo Indians. They are a curious lot, and are not strictly honest, as I found out from watching some of their transactions with tourists who want to take home souvenirs. The Indians sell their blankets by weight, and in order to increase their value they make it a practise to rub sand in the cloth. The cost of a blanket depends upon the number of pounds it weighs, and, of course, an extra pound of sand and dirt enables the shrewd Indian to turn an honest penny. They also have a curious habit of spreading their money out in a straight line on the ground before making any kind of investment, the object being not to have any money left over when the transaction is completed. It is the idea of calculating how far the money will go before buying and selling. These people with funny ways are very fond of stick-candy, and prize it more highly than plug tobacco, an article which they consider one of the greatest luxuries of life. When they go into a trader's store to buy calico, they always insist upon getting their supply from new stock put in that season, regardless of [illegible] there is already plenty on hand, left over from the year before. These Indians are certainly a funny lot of people.

Prescott, Arizona. JAMES MATTHEWS.

What you say about the extraordinary customs and habits of the Navajo Indians is true. They also are prone to other curious ways which seem strange to the white man. They are very fond of sugar, but are indifferent to the charms of nice sweet cream. They dearly love to buy a can of pears and a box of crackers, which, instead of taking home, they insist upon eating over the counter, right then and there. Did you ever see an Indian make a face when given a lemon for the first time? We mean the real lemon, not the kind that are referred to as being "handed out to a person." The look of amazement which overspreads poor Lo's face when he bites into one as if it were a sweet, juicy peach makes an impression upon the beholder that he never forgets. We advise you, however, if you ever think of trying to play any such tricks on the unsophisticated red man, that you have a place of refuge picked out in advance, so that he can't lay hands upon you.

Your readers might be interested in the following account of a new way they catch ducks out our way.

Owing to the long warm season last fall the ducks, which as usual had gathered in large numbers for the winter migration, decided to remain and enjoy themselves along the coast. As the birds were wary, some hungry hunters determined upon adopting the plan suggested by one of their number, having been practised at his native place in the Isle of Man.

Quantities of peas were scattered thickly day after day for a whole week in a certain pl[illegible] To this feast the ducks came [illegible] droves, night being their favorite feeding-[illegible] Meanwhile the men were at work cutting the [illegible] stiff brooms used aboard ships in rough [illegible] decks. The short bristles were then passed completely through carefully soaked peas, [illegible] protruded on either side for about [illegible] eighth of an [illegible]

Laborious as this task must have been, it was persisted in until a good bushel of peas had been so treated. These were spread out thickly at evening time on the well-baited ground. Strange quackings were heard all night by the listeners, who found a harvest of fine ducks covering the beach when morning broke.

It appeared from an examination that the unsuspecting birds gobbled up the peas as on previous evenings. The protruding bristles caused no trouble until the peas reached the entrance to the gizzard. But there the peas stuck fast, causing such distress as to make the birds lie perfectly still, stretched out upon the sand. Every movement meant pain, and with their heads stretched out flat before them they permitted themselves to be taken by hand.

More than 1,000 were taken in one night, chiefly canvasbacks and redheads. Their ill-gotten gains were not, however, as large as the poachers expected. Ice is scarce along most of the beaches, owing to the heat of the summer, and cold storage of this immense supply of game was an impossibility. By wagons and by schooners the ducks were hurried to the nearest railway-stations to be carried to the cities, but, owing to ignorance on the part of the shippers, prices realized were so small that it is doubtful if the whole catch of 1,050 fine fat ducks realized more than $50. WM. FROST.

Gaspé Basin, Canada.

This method of catching ducks exhibits more ingenuity than humanity on the part of the hunters. If they read more of the "Rough Rider Weeklies" and took Ted Strong as a model, they would soon learn that methods like this do not meet with the approval of most people.

(A letter from Virginia.)

I have been reading the "Rough Rider Weekly" for the last four months, and find that they are the best Wild West stories published. I think that Ted is an ideal hero for these stories. I hope Ted will have good luck in all of his adventures.

FRANK MEECH.

We have told Ted that you wish him good luck, and he says that he heartily thanks you.

(A letter from Maine.)

I think the "Rough Rider Weekly" is the best weekly of Western stories published. ARMIN FORNEY.

The "Rough Rider Weekly" is as popular in Maine as in the other States of the Union.

(A letter from Wyoming.)

I want to say very truthfully that I think the "Rough Rider Weekly" is the only creditable Western story published, for, remember, I am a Westerner myself, and I recognize these stories as true. F. S. FRANKSTEIN

This writer is competent to judge the truth of the stories, as he lives in the West, where some of Ted's adventures occur.

I told my friends how I liked the "Rough Rider Weekly," and then they read them. They say they are the best books they ever read. It is the best weekly ever published. The more I read, the more I like them. P. D. SULLIVAN.

Montreal, Can.

Your friends were pleased when they had their attention directed to the best weekly published.

(A letter from Canada.)

I have read others, but they are not as good as the "Rough Rider Weekly." Ted Strong is a real hero, and so are the rest

[illegible] Well, I will close now. With kind regards to [illegible] and Street & Smith. JAMES BUDWEISER.

[illegible]

[illegible]

Chicago, Ill.

[illegible] a great deal when he says that he prefers "Rough Rider Weekly" [illegible]

(A letter from Kansas.)

I have been reading the "Rough Rider Weekly" for quite a while. I think it is the best weekly published. It beats them [illegible]

It is the best weekly treating of Western life published to-day

(A letter from Montana.)

I think that the "Rough Rider Weekly" has the best stories published. [illegible] MILLER

There are no better stories of Western life published anywhere.

(A letter from Georgia.)

After reading several of the "Rough Rider Weeklies," I will say that they are the best stories of Western adventure I ever read. B. B. HARRIS

No author can approach Mr. Ned Taylor for vivid descriptions of life in the great West.

I am a reader of the "Rough Rider Weekly," and will say that it is a good book, and among the best I ever read MARY COLLINS

May you continue to read the "Rough Rider Weekly" for many years.

(A letter from New York.)

I thought I would tell you my opinion about the "Rough Rider Weekly." I read it every week, and think it is the best weekly I ever read. I cannot give it too much praise. S. B. RIDER.

If you read the "Rough Rider Weekly" every week, you must like it.

I have been a constant reader of "Tip Top" for a long time, and it is certainly one of the best papers published. "Rough Rider Weekly" is certainly all O. K. in its stories of Western adventure. Wishing you the best of luck, I remain
New York City CLARENCE FOX

The characters in these stories are bright young men who know no such word as fear.

(A letter from Texas.)

I can say a few words for the "Rough Rider Weekly." I think it is the best five-cent weekly ever published. VERNIA STRICKLIN

This young man lives in the State where Bud Morgan came from and perhaps knows the bluff and hearty rough rider.

(A letter from Ohio.)

I have read a great many books, but I have not read any that I like as well as the "Rough Rider Weekly." [illegible]

Our young friend has found that the "Rough Rider Weekly" is the most interesting of any library that he has ever read.

(A letter from Wyoming.)

I have read a good many "Rough Rider Weeklies." They are the best weeklies I ever read. Ted is a noble fellow, and his chum, Bud, is there with the goods when it comes to taming broncos. All the other fellows are brave and good [illegible] I [illegible] subscribe to the [illegible] they are fine and dandy. [illegible] fellow for [illegible] best book about the [illegible] written. [illegible] guess this is about [illegible] the feeling I have for the "Rough Rider [illegible] good [illegible] for the weekly [illegible] [illegible]

A long and interesting letter in which the reader tells us that he thinks that there is nothing like the "Rough Rider Weekly."

(A letter from New Jersey.)

I have read Ted Strong's adventures and I think they are clean and wholesome stories. DANIEL C. JENSEN

We are glad to hear that you like these stories, and expect that you will always remain a reader of the "Rough Rider Weekly."

I thought I would write and tell you what I thought of the "Rough Rider Weeklies." I have read quite a number of them. I think that they are among the best books published. The stories are very interesting and make good reading. I have a number of friends who read them, too. I asked them what they thought of the "Rough Rider Weekly," and they said it was very good. JAMES. THOMAS.
Butte, Montana.

Your friends could not help saying that they like the "Rough Rider Weekly."

(A letter from Iowa.)

I think it is a fine book to read, and I think Ted Strong is a fine young fellow. The weekly contains fine stories, and I like to read them. All the young rough riders are fine young fellows. Every one ought to get the book to read. JAY CONSIDINE.

When the young rough riders get on their cowboy dress and gallop over the plains they present a gay and thrilling picture.

(A letter from California.)

The "Rough Rider" series cannot be beaten for a good story. I like them very much. I get your weekly from a friend of mine, and must say I am very much pleased with it. J. T. MALONEY.

You could not help being pleased with such exciting stories as appear in the "Rough Rider Weekly."

(A letter from West Virginia.)

I have read the "Rough Rider Weekly" since it started. I think it is one of the best books I have ever read. HARRY BEALL.

The boys in Ted's troop never lack excitement, there is so much to be done on their various ranches.

(A letter from Pennsylvania.)

I have been reading the "Rough Rider Weekly" right along, and think it a very interesting story. It tells of Ted Strong and the rough riders right along. HARRY KOCH.

If you continue to read the "Rough Rider Weekly" you will always be interested.

(A letter from Illinois.)

I have been reading the "Rough Rider Weekly" since number 21, and I must say that they are fine. Ted Strong is an ideal American youth. I have always been interested in stories of life on the Western plains and in the mountains. I have read a great many stories of Western life, but I think the rough riders are unequaled. Thanking Mr. Taylor for his fine work, and your firm for publishing this weekly, I remain a constant reader of your stories, GEORGE BRISBIN.

What exciting times they have out West! There is always something of extraordinary interest going on in that part of the country.

THE ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY MONDAY. **HANDSOME COLORED COVER**

Ted Strong wants to make your acquaintance, boys, and we are convinced that you will be proud to have him as a friend. The tales of his adventures among the cowboys are full of fascinating interest. He is known to every one as "King of the Wild West" and he upholds the title.

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146—King of the Wild West's Broken Cinch; or, Stella's Stratagem.
147—King of the Wild West's Iron Box; or, Stella Turns the Tables.
148—King of the Wild West's Lost Brand; or, Stella in "No Man's Land."
149—King of the Wild West's Snow Camp; or, Stella Lost in the Wilderness.
150—King of the Wild West's Great Wolf-hunt; or, Stella Conquers "White Fang."
151—King of the Wild West at the Lone Tree; or, Stella Finds the Mother Lode.
152—King of the Wild West's Fighting-machine; or, Stella On the Blazed Trail.
153—King of the Wild West's Message from Afar; or, Stella's White-winged Couriers.
154—King of the Wild West Water-bound; or, Stella's Wild Night On the Cimmaron.
155—King of the Wild West's Test of Honor; or, Stella in Bondage.
156—King of the Wild West's Long Day Drive; or, Stella on the Staked Plains.
157—King of the Wild West's Stolen Pinto Pony; or, Stella's Night of Terror.
158—King of the Wild West's Shadow on the Wall; or, Stella and the "Masked Men."
159—King of the Wild West's Bronco Ball Tossers; or, Stella Bluffs the Umpire.

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